

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

SPARK

SIUE Faculty Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

2020

Drag Artist Interviews, 2019

Ezra Temko

etemko@siue.edu

Adam Loesch

SIUE, afoesch@siue.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://spark.siue.edu/siue_fac



Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Other Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Culture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Temko, Ezra, Adam Loesch, et al. 2020. "Drag Artist Interviews, 2019." *Sociology of Drag*, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Spring. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/interviewtranscripts/>).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SPARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in SIUE Faculty Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity by an authorized administrator of SPARK. For more information, please contact magraser@siue.edu.

Drag Artist Interviews, 2019

To cite this dataset as a whole, the following reference is recommended:

Temko, Ezra, Adam Loesch, et al. 2020. "Drag Artist Interviews, 2019." *Sociology of Drag, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville*. Spring. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/interviewtranscripts/>).

To cite individual interviews, see the recommended reference(s) at the top of the particular transcript(s).

Interview Participants

Amie Vanité.....	1
Brother Daniel	18
CeCe Drake	29
Charlotte Sumtimes	43
Crystal Clear	57
Diana Tunnel	65
Dixie Que.....	75
Ginger KaiKai	87
Heaven Leigh	95
Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland	100
Jenna Cydal.....	113
Jessica Leigh Foster	122
Khatriana Jackson	131
Kyra Banks.....	142
Lady Luscious.....	154
Logan Zass	167
Mahogany Knight.....	185
Rachel Michaels	196
Regina Steelheart.....	204
Roxy Malone	212
Sabrina White	222
Tiki Vonté	233
Appendix: Interview Questions	242

Interview with Amie Vanité

To cite this interview please use the following:

Jacob, Sandhya. 2020. Interview with Amie Vanité. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 29, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/amie-Vanité/>

Interviewer: Oh, eh, there isn't a lot of research on drag and drag artists and drag culture. Um, and if there is, it's more, there's more of an overarching question of like, what more can we learn about it? And so that's what my class and my instructor was wanting to do. And so, this is basically going to be about um your personal story, um, ideas that you have about drag, Um like how you define it. Um, what's the purpose of it, if there's any misconceptions, just like that. Um, but before we start, um, that picture that I sent you of your rights, um, for this interview, did you read that?

Amie Vanité: Yes, I did.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Amie Vanité: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Awesome. Um, I guess my first question for you would be, um, when did you first hear about drag or, um, what was your initial reaction to it?

Amie Vanité: Um, my first encounter with it. I mean, I don't know, uh, when I realized what it was like for real. Um, I was, I guess, I don't know, maybe like 15, 16 what I, when I understood like that it was actually a thing. Um, as I had been dressing up in anybody's clothes that I could get my hands on.

Interviewer: Right

Amie Vanité: from what I was, you know, the age of three, maybe even younger, I don't know, my grandmother and introduced me to The Wizard of Oz and uh, that was kind of the end of it.

Interviewer: Oh Wow. Okay.

Amie Vanité: And my, and her cousin, her, uh, her, my grandmother's cousin introduced me to The Nutcracker. So, uh, yeah, I was bouncing back and forth playing either Dorothy or Clara, um, all the time growing up until my you know dad nixed that.

Interviewer: Wow. Okay.

Amie Vanité: Uh, but, um, I don't, like I got in, I got involved in it, um, through being involved in, um, theater. Like all my, my life I came from very artistic families.

Interviewer: Sure.

Amie Vanité: Uh, not so much like my mom and dad, but like my mom's side of the family is very artsy and there are members of my dad's side of the family. You are also very artsy. And artsy as in like all forms of art, whether it's visual or musical or the theatrical what have you.

Interviewer: Oh Wow. That's awesome.

Amie Vanité: So yeah, I've had very, you know, creative background,

Interviewer: You have had a lot of influences in your life.

Amie Vanité: influencing that. Yes. My grandmother and grandfather, my mom's parents, um, both were avid singers. Um, my grandfather was in a band, uh, my grandmother, Oh, they love to dance. They were very great, wonderful, fantastic dancers.

Interviewer: Wow. That's awesome. Well that's great to hear. But would that be-

Amie Vanité: Oh yeah, no.

Interviewer: continue. You can continue

Amie Vanité: So, I was trying to get back to initial question of, uh, yeah, I don't know. Um, I, I don't, I guess learned about it from, I don't remember if it was, I guess it had to have been The Birdcage. Okay. I would've seen The Birdcage before I saw anything else.

Interviewer: And that was a, that was a movie, right, or?

Amie Vanité: I mean, aside from Mrs. Doubtfire.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Amie Vanité: Well, yeah, I definitely saw Mrs. Doubtfire before I saw The Birdcage.

Interviewer: That was a great movie.

Amie Vanité: Um, either way, you know, like I, I didn't think anything of it really. I don't know. But then I, you know, uh, friends who could do makeup zen it, I was like, well, I look pretty good and then I learned that people do this and perform and make money and I was like, get the fuck out of here. So.

Interviewer: So, you just went off the wind and did it

Amie Vanité: as, yeah, as soon as I was like, you know, 18 I, you know, figured out how to get into places to start performing and it just kind of took off from there.

Interviewer: Sure. Okay. Uh, when did you start performing? Like 18, like

Amie Vanité: I was, I was 18.

Interviewer: Okay.

Amie Vanité: I was 18 um.

Interviewer: Um, could you tell me a little bit about it, your first experience? Like what was it like? Did you have any expectations of it take?

Amie Vanité: It was, it was kind of a last-minute thing. Uh, friends of mine were getting dressed up to go to uh a birthday party and there were a whole bunch of drag queens performing.

Interviewer: Sure.

Amie Vanité: And I got there, and they were like, hey room. Some of our people didn't show up. You want to be in the show? And I was like, uh, sure. I guess. Um, so that's, it's just kind of happened. Um, but I performed a song called Bring on the Men from Jekyll and Hyde.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. That's a great play.

Amie Vanité: I was at some bar like way up, in the Poconos somewhere. Not that you're from around here. I don't know if you know where the Poconos is.

Interviewer: Uh, not, not quite sure,

Amie Vanité: but it's mountainous region in northern eastern uh PA.

Interviewer: Okay.

Amie Vanité: Like New York border

Interviewer: New York. Okay. Yeah, no, that gives me a better idea up.

Amie Vanité: Yeah, way up there. It was like a three-hour drive.

Interviewer: Did your, um, did like any family or friends or other loved ones come with you to that first performance or?

Amie Vanité: no, it was just, it was just the friends I was with that we were going up there. Um, my one friend was DJing this show itself and then, uh, there was a friend of mine was in the show and then other people didn't show up and they were like, oh, this person, is here and all ready to go. Let's just throw them in the show. So, I was in the show and then the friend that I was with that was performing got very upset because I was better than they were and made more tips. Drama ensued.

Interviewer: Well, you got to do what you gotta do

Amie Vanité: As it always does but uh

Interviewer: So you would say that you would say that like your family and friends and other loved ones, they like received you as uh becoming a drag artists and they were like accepting of that, or did you have a little bit of trouble at first?

Amie Vanité: Um, my dad was not the most, uh, thrilled person in any circum.. Like it was just a rough childhood,

Interviewer: right.

Amie Vanité: Um, with the way he thought and felt and everything else. So, um, he since my, his parents passed away... years apart from each other. Um, my mom's parents, uh, my grandmother is my mom's mom who just passed away.

Interviewer: Right.

Amie Vanité: And my grandfather, my dad, my mom's dad, uh, passed away in July. So, it hasn't even been a year yet. Like we're, I'm still grieving about that.

Interviewer: Oh that is a lot of.

Amie Vanité: Then one of my grandmothers, my grandmother's brother died heart and my heart, you know, my mom and uh, aunts and uncles, their, their uncle. So, my great uncle, um,

Interviewer: Wow

Amie Vanité: it's been, it's just been like Bam, Bam, Bam.

Interviewer: Yeah

Amie Vanité: And my dad recently had like, since, since my grandfather died and now that that Baba just passed... he's been different like for a while, and I don't know what's going on. Like it's, I don't know, he's, he sent me a text message, which I had to show a couple of weeks ago and he sent me a text message that said, break a leg with like lipstick. Never before. So, I don't know, like

Interviewer: it's all touch and go you would say,

Amie Vanité: yeah, it's touch and go. Yeah. But my, but he seems to be really coming around now,

Interviewer: That's good.

Amie Vanité: Like other people, family members and stuff, there wasn't really any, any pushback or anything now. Like they kind of all had it figured out before I had it figured out. So, it was all cool.

Interviewer: Okay. Well I'm glad.

Amie Vanité: they, you know, constantly come and support. They're there, you know, my grandmother she got to see me perform, uh, the last time I performed because,

Interviewer: that was wonderful.

Amie Vanité: The last show I've had. And so, the last time I performed on a stage she was there.

Interviewer: Looking back at it, how like precious, precious of a moment that was like, that. That's something that you can always look back on and you're seeing her smile at you and you know, supporting you. So that's good. Um, yeah, I am curious. Your name is Amie Vanité or?

Amie Vanité: Vanité yes, Amie Vanité.

Interviewer: How did you come up with that name?

Amie Vanité: Um, well the old, uh, urban legend. What have you, of how you get your drag name? Um, is you take the first female pet and uh, the street that you lived on.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Amie Vanité: first street you lived on, uh, growing up. So,

Interviewer: oh wow,

Amie Vanité: I had a pet frog. Her name was Amy.

Interviewer: Okay.

Amie Vanité: I stuck with that and I didn't really have a last name because the street I lived on was Chestnut and that it's just the it sounded weird

Interviewer: Amie Chestnut

Amie Vanité: I mean, funny, but not like I'm much more of a class act that I am,

Interviewer: it didn't fit your personality.

Amie Vanité: even though I know I can be rough, you know, so, um,

Interviewer: yeah.

Amie Vanité: it just depends on my audience, you know, what am I doing today?

Interviewer: Yeah, exactly. Okay.

Amie Vanité: Um, I stuck with Amie and then a Vanité got added on from a like drag sister I'll say, cause it wasn't really like motherly and I had already been involved in drag like before we met. Um, I never really had a drag mother I'm kind of a self-made queen.

Interviewer: Oh, okay that's the best.

Amie Vanité: But uh, we, you know, like so the, the doing all sorts of thing, you know, shows and whatever together. Um, and then I got involved in an awful, awful abusive relationship. Then turned marriage, which good heavens, I don't even.

Interviewer: What made you want to do that

Amie Vanité: I was like going saying, oh, you know, when you, you don't know you're being abused until you're too far in it and then you're stuck and then you can't do anything about it.

Interviewer: Because you feel like you've put too much time into it. You don't want to waste it.

Amie Vanité: And maybe they'll change.

Interviewer: Yeah

Amie Vanité: It'd be maybe, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. I definitely understand.

Amie Vanité: Long story short, the, best friend you well, he you know, I dunno, he's a jerk. I tried to reach out to him after the fact that he said that I basically deserved to everything I got. So yeah, he can go to hell. but umm You know, the reason we had the like whatever is because he was upset that I was in this relationship with somebody else and we were in a relationship together and it didn't mean we had to stop being friends, but I guess he and a whole bunch of other people knew how shitty this person was and were trying to tell me and I like I was not hearing it until it was too late. So anyway, um,

Interviewer: Hey, lessons learned.

Amie Vanité: I then I used to have another. Yes, exactly. I used to have another last name. Um, so Vanité was my middle name for quite some time. Um, because the person I was, uh, with was involved in the drag scene didn't really... well started dabbling in drag. Later on, after he realized that he could upstage me

Interviewer: Right

Amie Vanité: Um by being incredibly obnoxious and then like, uh, which I don't know why people thought it was funny. Um, well, and it wasn't even like his own thing. He would just, he would imitate, uh, what's your face? I can't remember her name uh the actress who played uh, Fran Drescher's, mother on The Nanny, if you're familiar with that show.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, that's a little bit of...

Amie Vanité: it was,

Interviewer: I dunno.

Amie Vanité: That...Obnoxious nasal Jew, right. Not that I have anything, you know, to try it, but just like come up with your own character, like.

Interviewer: Yeah, some people can't do that, but

Amie Vanité: You're not smart enough to, so people thought it was hysterical, obviously.

Interviewer: Yeah. So how would you

Amie Vanité: Enough about that moron.

Interviewer: How would you characterize your drag then? You know, you were saying that he kind of took his show and um basically mimicked off to somebody else. What is, how would you characterize your drag, your drag style?

Amie Vanité: Um, I mean, not that I don't. I do impersonation very, very well.

Interviewer: would you say?

Amie Vanité: but it's, it's more of a, it's, it's a little bit more, classy than it is anything else. I mean, I'm a chameleon. I can adapt to whatever situation. Excuse me, situation. I, you know, um,

need to be in for whatever audience I'm going to, I'm going to be performing for. Um, but I've always remained like, I don't know. Um,

Interviewer: like would you say like,

Amie Vanité: oh, I'm like old school, like I'm very old school. Uh, when it comes to like the art form, because I think

Interviewer: Somewhat of a glamour, vogue type of. Okay.

Amie Vanité: The theater, I mean, yeah, I guess so. I'm very, yeah, I'm, I'm, I'm very, I'm pretty. Fishy, hey call it today cause

Interviewer: okay. Yeah.

Amie Vanité: Um, I. but I like I do Judy Garland. I do a lot as Liza Manila, Céline Dion, um, Carol Burnett, Bette Midler like people who are mostly dead.

Interviewer: Sure.

Amie Vanité: They're not all dead,

Interviewer: but legends

Amie Vanité: has then, you know, I have friends. Yes, yes, exactly. Be the legends, the gay, a female without that they're gay. But like female gay icons, you know,

Interviewer: Yeah, I get what you mean

Amie Vanité: the people. Yeah.

Interviewer: So uhm how often do you perform or like where do you perform in Pennsylvania?

Amie Vanité: I have performed all over. Um, I am, I live in West Reading, um, which is a separate entity from the city of Reading. Uhm...and from this epicenter I have moved, I shouldn't say moved. I've performed, um, all up and down like the eastern part of PA and some like central Pa and I performed in Harrisburg. Uh, Lancaster.

Interviewer: Oh Wow.

Amie Vanité: um oh, all the way up to the Poconos, Allentown. Uh, like, so the, I've been, I've been all over. I'm working on Philly. I don't know, I don't know why I haven't performed in Philly yet. Like it's not that far away. And I know plenty of people who perform in Philly, so I don't know if people are just hesitant to bring me and do their shows because I'll steal their spotlight or, whatever, I don't know what it is.

Interviewer: Well, I guess you'll have to see for yourself and just go to Philly and you know, strut your stuff.

Amie Vanité: I guess so. So, I mean they know who I am.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right.

Amie Vanité: I've got, and I understand because I also have a lot of things in the works and I'm sure there's a lot more like in the works going on for them down there in an area where there's just a lot more going on in general. So, I know what it's like to, uh, you know, be a performer and uh, have, you know, have, we do have stuff that doesn't link up me, and you've got to figure it out for another time, or you know, whatever so.

Interviewer: Yeah, I understand. But you know, you know, if it's your time, it's your time. If not, there are multiple other places that you can and I'm sure, right. You know, I'm sure somebody would be willing to have you, you know, like you

Amie Vanité: And considering all of the things that are going on in my life right now, like,

Interviewer: Yeah

Amie Vanité: My family. Like, I, I kind of need to stay home for the most part now because a lot changing,

Interviewer: Yeah, it's definitely understandable

Amie Vanité: But it doesn't mean I can't travel for a night or a weekend.

Interviewer: Yeah definitely and you know performing and just take it because you need a breather sometimes. You know what I mean? And I guess possibly like, you know, getting ready for a performance that could be kind of therapeutic.

Amie Vanité: Oh yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer: What, um, what actually goes into, um, your, I guess routine of getting ready for performing? Like, do you do any particular thing before performance or.

Amie Vanité: um, you know, uh, I at least like to start rehearsing whenever I'm going to be performing like two weeks before, you know, depending, I mean, if, I don't, if it's, if I'm learning completely new music that obviously I'm going to listen to it on repeat for like three months. Right. Um, oh, for crying out loud. Oh, one moment. I'm Sorry.

Amie Vanité: Talking to person on telephone* Hello. Hello.

Amie Vanité: resuming interview* Nobody was there. Ha. so Um, I'll pick my music. Um, you know, you got to figure out what's going on. That's typically about like two weeks to like a month.

Interviewer: Sure.

Amie Vanité: Uh, before a performance I figured out what I'm doing. Um, and then I typically start getting ready the night before a performance. I will, um, if I've grown any, you know, facial hair back or anything or arm hair, chest, hair or whatever, I'll get my clippers. And, you know, trim all that off. And, uh, sometimes I will, if I have to get up super early to start getting ready, um, cause it all, it typically all depends on what time my performance is, you know, during the day. If it's like a later, like show, like at nine o'clock, I typically won't start getting ready, um, until like three in the afternoon.

Interviewer: Yeah. that makes sense

Amie Vanité: Um, but if I need to be somewhere at like noon, then, you know, I don't want to have to wake up at six o'clock in the morning to shave and shower and do all of that stuff. So, I will, you know prep my shower and shave and whatever the night before, so all I have to do is just wake up and start putting myself together. Um,

Interviewer: yeah

Amie Vanité: But the make-up process, um, oh, and I do, and I, and I'll, I'll paint my nails the night before as well. Right. It's anything, if you, you know, if, if that is the least amount of things I prepped for that I, you know, this paint, I always paint my nails the night before. So then when the, uh, this is where there's a baby's butt. Uhm. The makeup process typically takes anywhere from like two to three hours depending on what I'm doing.

Interviewer: Oh wow

Amie Vanité: and then,

Interviewer: oh wow

Amie Vanité: yeah. Uh Huh.

Interviewer: that...

Amie Vanité: I, uh, I'll usually have a bite to eat after most of my face is on, before I put my lips, I always do my lips last.

Interviewer: See I never, I'm always wanting to put my lips first. I don't know why I do, and then I go out and I'm like, where'd the lipstick go? But I guess you could say that I am not very good with, putting makeup on. So maybe that's why my makeup is like six months old and still like half full, with, like, foundation. So, that's just, I guess, I guess that's my biggest challenge. But, uh, what would be your biggest challenge? Um, in doing drag or being a drag artist? Um, is it in your performing, is it an, um, you know, other people's views of you? Like what would it be?

Amie Vanité: uhm think the most difficult thing I have encountered is dealing with people and their drama.

Interviewer: Okay.

Amie Vanité: Like I come from, you know, I, you see, I come from a theatrical background.

Interviewer: right

Amie Vanité: Like I said, I, I get the theater, I've been doing theater and then I got involved in drag, which is also very theatrical, but drag, you know, is completely different for everyone, but what drag is for me isn't what it is. It really doesn't come close to, uh, when I, you know what I perceive as, um, other people's primary interest in, you know, doing drag or uh, watching it or being involved. Like it's the, you know, the super cattiness, the over the top, just dramatic whatever and that I can't, I can't, I just can't with it. I can't, I'm here to do a job that I enjoy and if

you are going to rain on my parade while I'm doing it and it sucks all the fun right out. Like I am not here. I don't care how big the crown is. I don't care how big mine is like that. It's not why I'm here. Like I'm here because I'm talented and I enjoy performing and people enjoy watching me perform.

Interviewer: So, like is this coming from other artists or is this coming from people like in general?

Amie Vanité: Um, it's a combination of, you know, what I've seen on TV and um, people I've met in person and, or worked with closely in my area. I used to have a monthly show, um, that some people thought they could help with, but really their whole agenda was to bring my show into their venue, learn everything about it, and then get rid of me and steal all of my performers and bad mouth, like nonstop. It was, I've been

Interviewer: That is really unfortunate

Amie Vanité: and you know, uh, a lot of it had to do with the person that I was married to. Um, because nobody liked him and you know, then vicariously I must be an awful, horrible human being as well. So, I just got thrown under the bus and um, and these people like then, then, you know, they find that we break up, "Oh, we're so happy for you. He was some horrible, let's work together again." And I'm like, "I don't trust you people as far as I can throw you," you know?

Interviewer: Yeah

Amie Vanité: but I'll give it a go. You're reaching out a hand or whatever and then I, you know, start working with them again and it's the same shit. And I'm like, get, no, I'm done.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amie Vanité: You know, you don't have the right to,

Interviewer: What do you think causes that?

Amie Vanité: What do I think?

Interviewer: What do you think causes people to, um, basically treat you like that? Like what are the

Amie Vanité: I, you know, I don't know. I look back on things and it seems like the majority of my problem is people want what I have, and know that I am such a kind-hearted person that I, I trust what not that I. Yes. That is what it was. I trust people too easily. Well, at least I used to. I don't so much anymore. Um

Interviewer: well at least you know you have really great stuff,

Amie Vanité: they put on this. Yeah. Um, you know, they put on this, let's be friends and let's work together and lets you do all this and it's just a ploy to get what I have and leave me with nothing.

Interviewer: yeah.

Amie Vanité: Like they just, I don't know. I'm easy prey for narcissistic abusers.

Interviewer: Well don't say that because then you're, you know, opening up into the universe for that to come back into your life.

Amie Vanité: Yeah. I know. So, it's not going to, I won't let it. I know all the signs now.

Interviewer: Well, um, if that's the case, you know, taking the good and the bad, um, in drag and like in your experiences, how has it like impacted, how has it impacted you or your confidence as a person? Um, or when you're out of drag?

Amie Vanité: Um. I don't know. Like, I don't really put on like, my, Amie isn't really any different from Christopher.

Interviewer: Right.

Amie Vanité: Like what. It's just makeup and costume. Like I, I generally tend to, you know, it's the same personality that I always have.

Interviewer: Right.

Amie Vanité: Um, I mean, I can definitely turn it on if I need to or uhm if you're fine if I want to. But

Interviewer: is it basically just like, because you guys, because Amie and Christopher are the same person, um, it's, it's kind of like second nature for you or is it more of like a big, like light switch that you turn on and boom, like you can totally see a difference?

Amie Vanité: No, no, no, there's, it's not like a light switch or anything. uh It's, I don't know, like I, I've seen, I've seen a lot of people, um, you know, completely change persona at once. The drag goes on.

Interviewer: Right.

Amie Vanité: And then I've seen other people that I've worked closely with who put it all on and they're just like, Me, is still the same personality is still the same person.

Interviewer: Right

Amie Vanité: No, maybe, maybe, maybe a little, a little extra over the top for magic effect since we're onstage but, or on a microphone or what have you. But yeah. Um, so I don't, my confidence is, but I'm, I'm, I'm like the epitome of, Oh, how do I, how do I put it? Um, I'm like, I'm like, I'm an introverted extrovert.

Interviewer: okay Yeah. I'm the same way I know what you mean.

Amie Vanité: Like, I, you know, I, I would entertain what they want, you know, but at the same time I have, I'm definitely that person who was sitting like in a corner and just people watching, minding their own business.

Interviewer: yep

Amie Vanité: And I think a lot of that has to do with how exhausted being on is when I have to be on like, so what? I'm not off, I don't need to be. So, I'm not like, I can just sit back and relax and not have to worry about being on.

Interviewer: So, with you saying, um, so obviously it's the same personality, but you have Christopher and you have Amie. So, um, in terms of like identity, um, or like sexuality, what do you identify with?

Amie Vanité: Oh, I'm uh,

Interviewer: like pronouns.

Amie Vanité: I definitely prefer preferred. Christopher, he him his pronouns. Um, cisgender. Okay. Definitely. Um, but uh, yeah, I, you know, and that, and that's another thing that like a lot of people don't get. Like because, and when drag queens were making their own pages for, uh, um, the other drag character,

Interviewer: Right.

Amie Vanité: Is to promote what they were doing. Now a lot of drag queens these days don't do that.

Interviewer: Right

Amie Vanité: uhm They just have one page and you know, they use their, their real name and what flux of people coming after me trying to get with Amie. And it's like, hm, oh that is a lot of makeup and a lot of, uh, shaping garments that are not natural for my body.

Interviewer: Right. ok

Amie Vanité: And it just, you know, people, it's annoying that I have to yell const-like, not that I have to, but you know, I just, I let me to let people like you, no, no, no, leave me alone. Like, I'm not a rude person. I'm not going to like block you or something, you know, if you're not giving me a reason, like it's, you know, I don't, but I do get it. I get an influx of people who don't understand that I'm not a transgendered individual. Um, not that I'm affected by that, but, um,

Interviewer: but do you want people to identify you with who you identify with or what you identify with?

Amie Vanité: Exactly. Like I'm in drag all... often enough that if I am in some sort of romantic situation, which isn't a thing anymore with the amount of stuff I'm going through in my brain, um, you know, I, if, if that were to happen, I would prefer to feel and look like a boy. Cause that's what I, I'm not, uh,

Interviewer: you're not what, I'm sorry.

Amie Vanité: Nothing. I was going on another tangent. You were saying.

Interviewer: It's okay. Um, so would that being said, like do you think drag is, um, somewhat sexual in a way? Like do people like sexualize you or?

Amie Vanité: Oh, I think people absolutely do, which is why there is this influx of craziness with the drag queen story hour stuff. Cause I just started like that up in my area here. That's the picture of me and the big pink hat and my grandmother and the other pictures of pineapple and stuff. Um, I started doing the story hour things and initially it was all fine and then some crazy uh, fundamentalist Christian. I don't know. They show up with bagpipes and like crusade flags. Um, and she's screaming at these parents and children about how horrible they are for going. And you know, it's all the peop-, all sorts of nonsense. I don't know where they come up with this stuff. Hashtag fake news. I'm like, it's ridiculous. The amount. Like, I don't, that they think, I don't even, I don't even understand how they could possibly think the things that they think are going on in there. I'm in a, I'm in a library with children and their parents and other members of law enforcement because your dumb ass just had to show up and started screaming at children like, Oh, is your, you know, it's, it's sexualizing them and it's, it's teaching them that abhorrent behavior is acceptable and

Interviewer: yeah. But all you're doing is like reading a book.

Amie Vanité: Yeah, exactly. I, uh, I sing a couple songs and read a couple stories about, you know, the general principle in, in, in all of the stories that I read are, um, is like, is to be nice to each other, treat others how you want to be treated. Uh, it's okay to feel different because no one is the same. Even though we're, um, made up of the same stuff. Like we, while we are all the same, we are all unique individuals and we should respect and treat each other as such because somebody else is doing their life. As long as it's not hurting themselves or anybody else shouldn't concern you, it doesn't affect you at all. So live and let live.

Interviewer: I definitely agree with that. And so, you mentioned like religion with that aspect. So I'm kinda curious as to how, um, like social identities have like impacted your experience of drag or like vice versa, so like, um, social identities such, um, I guess gender, race, age, class, um, sexuality, disability, geography, like, um, or the interaction of, um, some of these social identities, um, how they impacted like your experience of drag or, and, or, um, your experience of your social identity that you associate with?

Amie Vanité: Um, well, I grew up in you know, both sides of my family is very Catholic. I went to Catholic school, I went to a Catholic high school. Uh, they eventually kicked me out and then I went to public school, uh, where I had no problems at all. Um, because people accepted me for who I was. I didn't tolerate bullshit. They know. They literally, they did. They, uh, the principal nun at the Catholic high school, uh, she figured out, you know, ways to get rid because that's, they can do that. They're a private institution, you pay to go there and if they don't want you there, they don't need your money. They can get rid of you. Yeah. So that's what they did. Um, but I would say like an eve, but even so like there are, or a Catholic people who absolutely suck and there are Catholic people in my time, you know, on this earth being a Catholic because you like you really can't get rid of it once they have you unless you convert to another religion which I am not planning on doing

Interviewer: So, you would associate with Catholicism as well?

Amie Vanité: Not so much. I mean there, there have been certain people, you know, that have definitely sucked, but you know, most of, most of the Catholics that I know don't treat me any different, um, at all. Uh, and I really haven't met any people who, uh, have given me a hard time with anything. Like I've had, you know, like snickers and stuff from kids in high school or whatever. Um, but I don't know. I don't know. There's just, I don't know. I don't know what it is. I don't know if I had just hang around with the right kind of people or if I just look like I'm not somebody people should fuck around with. I dunno. Like I don't get a lot of flak from anyone really, uh, minus crazy, uh, crazy religious fanatics who are not, not so much Catholics, but like all the other crazy bumps. I don't know. I like, there's just, there's just crazy people out there who read all sorts of wrong info, I had some protestor come up to me and one of my story hours to use, you know, had to let me know that there were people there who didn't support what I was doing and needed to be there to pray over everyone, uh, to shield them, uh, lies in the evil and that they're very sorry for whatever happened to me in my life to cause me to be this way. And they hope one day I'll find my true calling. I'm like, are you for real? Like, where, where? Who beamed you down?

Interviewer: What do you, what do you think the purpose of drag is then, like for you or for anybody out there doing drag? Well,

Amie Vanité: it's, it's completely changed. Um, I come from the, the theatrical background of drag where, you know, um, its origins where, you know, back before the time of Shakespeare and through the time of Shakespeare when women weren't allowed to be on stage, so men had to play those characters, you know, on stage. Um, so drag for me comes, uh, it's just that it's, it's, you know, impersonating female, um, you know, musically or, uh, the, you know, whatever I'm doing, I'm in. It's some form of feeder, whether it's, you know, straight play or musical or regular drag show, you know, what have you, or the story hour than, you know, yada yada.

Interviewer: But that's how you would I define it.

Amie Vanité: but, that's how I define it for me, it's something, it's a very theatrical art form for me. Um, which is, you know, it's original intent, I guess. Uh, but when the civil rights stuff started happening in the 60s and the Stonewall riots and everything and all that. Um, that's when that's when drag queens like kind of branched off and became activists for change, uh, drag artists have become, uh, for Bonaire for fundraisers and benefits, the causes and what not. Um, uh, so why all I, which I gave that I identify with you with all that stuff as well. I have performed and organized many benefits and fundraisers. Um, so that's, you know, that's where I come from with it. It's, it's definitely something theatrical that I love to do as a performer. Um, but I'm also really grateful that while I do this stuff, it's also a way for me to sometimes give back to the community or, um, you know, with the story hour, like there was somebody there, I ran into uh, them after like the fact with all of these crazy protestors at my last one. And they were like, so one of I ran into somebody that was like, um, he was like, I don't understand. I don't understand what people have with this. Like what's wrong and this person, and that I was talking to was telling me that the, you know, the person they ran into separate undercover guy that was there is like, you know, totally a part of that crowd, this narrow minded one track. This is, you know, from the devil, why would you do what you know? And he, this, this guy is totally changed his

mind. He was there, he saw what I did, and he was, he thought it was the greatest thing ever. Like, so that's, you know, it's, it's about, it's about changing minds. It's about opening eyes. It's about spreading awareness and you know, giving back. And having a good time and entertaining people all under, you know, it's, that's kind of where I'm at with,

Interviewer: Okay, that's awesome.

Amie Vanité: You know, I'm in it because I love performing, which is why I got a new one. But there's so much more to it, you know, that I've learned over the years. Um, so much good. You know, like you, because you don't get to see a lot of the good or hear about a lot of the good because it's muffled by drama or scandal or god knows what else, so.

Interviewer: Would you say that, um, like RuPaul's drag race, is that a good depiction of what drag artist is or do you disagree with? Um,

Amie Vanité: No, not at all. I've, I've met RuPaul.

Interviewer: Oh, you have?

Amie Vanité: Uh, not that she would ever remember who I, she didn't stay around long enough to... [recording briefly cuts out] when I just started out, uh, you know, discovering what drag was, and I just seen, uh, you know, I just, I realized who she was cause I was, was in To Wong Foo and uh, uh, uh, I, I don't know, I don't think YouTube was a thing yet, but I saw, I dunno. I, yeah, I figured out who she was and um, or who he was I should say. And uh, well he, I don't know, Ru was all done up. Um, it was at, um, uh, Pride in New York, um, she was all done up. And I like there she was, and I was, you know, star struck as a budding aspiring drag queen, fresh out of high school. And um, I was like, uh, I said, you know, I was like, oh my goodness, it's so nice to meet you. Um, I'm just starting out. Do you have any advice for, you know, there's something, you know, like that, like, you know, I'm just starting out, have any tips, so I don't know what I said. And she gave me that like once over look up and down, like I wasn't even in drag, so I don't understand, like gave me the up and down, look, rolled their eyes, turned around and just walked away.

Interviewer: Oh No.

Amie Vanité: Like how can you like, how can you even do that to somebody? Like I don't care who you think you are. Yeah, that's rude. Especially do which like still technically kid, like and now you're all like, now, now you have a TV show and you're all about, oh, drag con and Love, all this stuff for kids and blah blah blah. And it's like you're a total fake. You are such a fake. I can't deal with it. Like it's ridiculous. It really, it does, it, it, it irks me that there are people who I, and it's not just me. I have many friends who have actually worked with Ru and same thing, same thing, you know, just if that camera isn't rolling, nothing that comes out of your mouth matters. Domo, it's my time.

Interviewer: Well, I'm sorry that you had like a bad experience with, um, RuPaul um, if, if there, if there was like that, like you could change about like the drag scene or like the drag community

or drag like in general, um, what would it be and why? Like taking, taking that experience and you know, what, what would you change?

Amie Vanité: I would, I would change this, this attitude of, you know, it's, it's just ego. I don't know what it is. It's this, I'm the end all be all like we are all different and we all bring our own unique things to this because that's what drag is, drag is different for everyone,

Interviewer: Right.

Amie Vanité: I, the reason I do drag is certainly not the reason that you do drag or the reason that you over there, do drag, like we're all in this for something different or are drawn to it for different reasons and we should like, it's, it's, it all goes back to my story hour stuff. Treat people nicely. Like we're all here working together in the same show. It'd be why, why are we at each other at each other's throats? Like, not that I'm ever at someone's throat, but I've definitely had people at mine and I'm always the last to figure out why. It's usually because somebody over here said something about this, said something about that because you said, and it's like, oh my god, how old are we and no that is not what I said.

Interviewer: Yeah,

Amie Vanité: Cause you got whisper down the alley.

Interviewer: It's like playing telephone. So, if you, if you could

Amie Vanité: yup.

Interviewer: You know, if somebody were to come up to you and ask you, um, if you had any tips on being a drag, being a drag artist or learning about drag or the culture, what would you tell them?

Amie Vanité: Oh boy. I would say honey, don't get involved with me. No, no. I have, I have many little people under my, you know, that call me mother, which is adorable and gross at the same time, but I do not feel or look old enough to be anyone's mother. Um, but uh, so I used to do, um, I used to, I would love to get it back up and running. I used to do a benefit show every year for, um, an LGBT youth group here in Reading. And because, you know, people suck and of ruined it for everybody. So, I, we, um, I would go in there and, uh, like paint my face while they watched and talk about, you know, the history of drag and they answered their questions whenever they had. It's, you know, be you, find, you know, your talent or whatever it is that inspires you to want to do this and, and hone in on it, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Amie Vanité: Um, nobody don't, you know, listen to people take advice, but don't let anybody tell you what to do. You know, you have to make it your own.

Interviewer: I definitely agree with you there. Yeah. Well, I, that was my last question for you. Um, I hope this hour was as entertaining for you as it was for me and even more than entertaining educational, and I'm just kind of inspiring and you know, with your interview, I'm hoping that it can educate others and, um, get a little like peek on your life and your perspective

on drag. And you know, some of the experiences that you've had and, uh, with family, other outsiders, um, with your experiences and performing. And with those last questions that I asked you, just get a little idea about what drag is about and you know, the purpose of it. And obviously there are a lot of purposes and perspectives that people take on drag. Um, but I definitely enjoyed yours. Thanks.

Amie Vanité: Yeah, no problem.

Interview with Brother Daniel

To cite this interview please use the following:

Schilling, Henry. 2020. Interview with Brother Daniel. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 23, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/brother-daniel/>

Interviewer: When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Brother Daniel: Oh, man. I feel like, it feels like something I have always known about- oh no! I saw Rent! Yeah, I mean, Angel's character in the movie, is, at least, they call her a drag queen. When I went to my first show was actually during SIUE's sexual health class. You have to go on a field trip, and you have to do something you've never done before that's like in relation to the gender sexuality something or other spectrum. And so, my friends took me to a drag show, and I had never been before. And I really loved it. One of my friends was just kind of taken a back because he sat there the whole time going "I don't know if I am sexually confused or not right now?" and I was like "That's what makes it awesome!" Because I've always loved the way that people could just play with gender and make it their own and fly in the face of every single societal expectation that exists around it, it's always been very relieving to me. So, that was my initial reaction.

Interviewer: That's actually really cool! We've covered a lot of those topics in our class, too. When did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Brother Daniel: I started performing in June of last year, and kind of the Reader's Digest version I guess, is my friend invited me to an open stage night, and it's literally an open call every week. And I was bored, I didn't have a lot of friends, and I had very little to do. So, I was sitting next to him and I was like "Wait, so I'll just like paint on a mustache and they'll let me on stage? This sounds fun." Which of course was brutally wrong, that is not all that drag is. But, I guess it just kind of, it looked like a fun thing that I wanted to try, and so I literally learned basic makeup skills for the first time in my life and jumped on the stage like the very next week and got just enough positive feedback that I thought I could do it again, and, you know, here we are ten months later and I have not stopped.

Interviewer: How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist? Do they know at all?

Brother Daniel: Oh, they know. Let's see... That's... I'm trying to, well, drag was kind of like a, just kind of the next step because I was already like the gay pariah. I come from a pretty conservative family. My dad and my sisters were excited and kind of like intrigued like they thought it was funny. My grandparents were mortified. They generally just don't talk to me about it at all. I've put it in context for whenever I talk to my family at all, I put it in the context of like I've been in theater all my life, and here's a stage. And that kind of softened it. But overall, I have to stay far away from those conversations with my grandparents. They're odd members of my family that

sometimes say something that sounds like they're supportive but never around anyone else. My dad and sisters actually did come to a show one time, so that was pretty cool.

Interviewer: That would be super fun, knowing that they're a member in the audience.

Brother Daniel: Yeah, and most of my friends are other drag performers, so clearly, they were all fine. Some of my friends were just kind of "Oh, okay" they, didn't have any opinion on it one way or another and some of them just don't talk to me as much anymore. So, which I mean it's this is completely unsolicited commentary, but it feels very similar to the conversations you have whenever you're coming out. Except instead of "This is my identity" it's "This is what I'm doing publicly for everyone to see and give me money!" So, it's it kind of takes everything that was already like they were biting their tongues on whenever you were just thinking kid, and then just pulls it all out.

Interviewer: Pretty solid though, with the comparison.

Brother Daniel: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where does your drag name come from?

Brother Daniel: This is my favorite. So, kind of two ways, the first thing is when that I have a background with, I grew up in the church, and, so, my religious satire numbers have kind of like been a really big deal in my drag life and my reputation and just the numbers that I'm known for, I guess. But before that the friend that was helping me whenever I was first starting drag was also someone who met me as the like awkward church kid and then saw me grow into whatever I am today. And so, he thought it would be funny to be like "Ah no you should be Brother Daniel." So, it didn't at that point it was just like "Yeah this sounds good it'll be fun" and it's really stuck.

Interviewer: It's a nice way to embrace the past.

Brother Daniel: Yeah.

Interviewer: There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag from drag queen to drag king to glamour queen, male impersonator, bearded queens, and all this other stuff. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do or style?

Brother Daniel: I'm a drag king. So, my style, I'm very. I guess Brother Daniel is very charming and adorable, and that's kind of just how that's gone. It was not intentional at all. But everybody just started thinking like "Oh look at that little baby-faced dude in a mustache" and so that's how everything has come to be. I actually started out really liking rap like I love rapping I just never get to do it because it's not really all the way to my brand. But, between that and just kind of like showtunes very energetic numbers. Overall just things that I think will either have a lot of fun with the audience or emotions and concepts that I'm trying to convey that like either I'm dealing with or I feel like a lot of people deal with. One thing that I've been very, that I dived into a lot has been some of the more religious and mental health concepts. So, I kind of, I don't even know how I decided to do this but I start out with like a priest outfit and then when I take the priest outfit off I have duct tape all over me and it's all like slurs that the religious community uses against queer people. And the first time I did it, it was like a stab in the dark. And it's literally

become something that people will ask me for now whenever I sign on to do shows. I've pulled the concept in a couple of different ways. So, I guess that's another thing that I, like is within my style? But I do both of those things.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. I've never really seen that with other performers either in that kind of way.

Brother Daniel: Yeah, I think actually you're right that is one thing that I think I've done that I think you don't see a lot.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, that's really cool. Gosh. I guess that kind of leads into our next question of who or what has influenced your drag, so-

Brother Daniel: Definitely that. A lot of times I, especially if I'm like booked for something and I'm just like very emotional or dealing with a lot I'm probably going to pick something topical just so I'm, just so I can make that connection for myself. Other than that, my drag family has been a really big influence. So, within maybe a month I got kind of pulled into with some of my best friends this drag family. And they taught me more stuff about makeup and performing style and costuming and pretty much everything under the sun, so whenever, when people see me perform a lot of times, they connect me directly to my drag dad, really easily. And a lot of that comes from like we were very similar before I was adopted by him, but then just like I've been able to kind of come under all of their influence and be able to pull things out in my own way. But that's then, I have my drag dad who's very showy and does a lot of the like vaudeville style really outward numbers, and then I have my like my I guess my grandpa, it's really weird I'm older than both of them. And they do a lot of like they're really heavily trained in dance, so, their dance skills are out of this world and I don't have any of those. But at the same time between the two of them, I've learned a lot about just what it takes to have a stage presence and what kind of songs are good for which crowds and that kind of thing, so.

Interviewer: I wonder- I'm going to add a question.

Brother Daniel: Okay.

Interviewer: How did you get into your drag family?

Brother Daniel: They started popping up at the open stage nights I was performing at and I was just in love with them because they're these really awesome performers and they're also just really cool people, like they're all really friendly. And, so, after a couple weeks of them showing up and I, I had talked to them, but it was more of like me just being a ridiculous fanboy and them tolerating me. They apparently, these two performers were fighting, they're father and son, and they were fighting over who actually got to adopt me. But so, I, the conversation was kind of like played with for like a week, but then Andy, my drag dad, came up to me after a performance at one point was like "Hey, wanna be my son?" And then I had to do this initiation, it was a pickleback shot which is like whiskey chased with pickle juice. Really it was literally at like midnight in a bar, on like a Thursday night it was not anything special at all, except it was.

Interviewer: Thursday-

Brother Daniel: Yes (laughter)

Interviewer: I know that from the drag class that there's like different families that they get in a part of, so it's like interesting to see how people-

Brother Daniel: Usually it's just the, etiquette-wise you shouldn't really be asking someone to adopt you, but a lot of people do and it's not a big deal. But really, it's like a performer will see someone that is newer and think that they either have a style that fits in with theirs or the families in a way or just like "Yes, that's the one I want to mentor."

Interviewer: Yeah-

Brother Daniel: Yeah, it's a mentorship. But it's also, I mean, they're also, like I said, my best friends. So, it's, but it's very based in like, whenever there's something I that I need advice on or when I'm struggling with a song choice or something like that, then that's the avenue that I go to. And there are six or seven other people in my family. So, we all just kind of bounce ideas back and forth all the time, it's pretty cool.

Interviewer: That actually sounds really cool. Again, like bringing it up in drag class, I didn't really know.

Brother Daniel: It's- another performer recently compared all of the houses in St. Louis to like high school cliques in a really wholesome and funny way. But that's sometimes a lot what it feels like. Is that, we're all over here in our little house and we have our own internal stuff that's going on sometimes and then sometimes there's something's going on between houses and sometimes there's stuff that's just going on and it's all very dramatic at times. I mean, we're all performers, it's not gonna get hairy.

Interviewer: Does your house have like a specific name that they go under?

Brother Daniel: Yeah, the House of Defiance.

Interviewer: The House of Defiance.

Brother Daniel: Yes, they're a lot of houses that every performer in the house takes that last name and we're one of the houses that don't do that. So, none of us have the word defiance in our names. So?

Interviewer: It's like a formal thing, it's like "Brother Daniel Defiance"

Brother Daniel: No, I toyed with it for a second, but I can't let go of my name.

Interviewer: No, that's perfectly understandable. Okay. Next one. Do you consider your drag political?

Brother Daniel: Yes. Sometimes. Yeah. I- it can be. The two kind of sides to that a) I mean I recently accepted a booking at a- at a support show that is raising money for a black power fundraiser, so their definitely, as a performer you get, you get into places where you're asked to support specific things and I very much believe in the way that and where they're sending the money and what's going on and the things I want to put my name to, kind of, also I regularly put really offensive words on my body and make a very specific statement that "screw what the church is

thinking about gayness because here we all are." But I also think that in a lot of ways drag itself is inherently political. Like we're taking things that society's been trying to push on us for decades and throwing them in everyone's face and actually the very beginning like the very first drag queens they were actually, like that was illegal. It was illegal to cross-dress at the time that drag started. So, it, I believe that it is inherently political but also, I think a lot of us occasionally get a political tone. But there are definitely been some arenas that I've been in-

Interviewer: Neverminded I just found the one where it says talk about drag family. There's another question that can do. How often do you perform?

Brother Daniel: Roughly, usually three to five times a month something or other. Which it fluctuates cause there are, I'm still relatively new so there's still a lot of open stage nights that I'll end up in. It also depends on what's going on at that point. Like there's some organization that I work with that has done a couple different benefit shows throughout the last couple of months, so I've been heavily involved with that. But I would say I try to make it out, I try to average it to once a week, but it doesn't actually look like once a week. What it usually looks like is I'm performing every day for a week and then nothing for the rest of the month.

Interviewer: And are there like specific places that you usually perform at?

Brother Daniel: I'm usually at either Grey Fox Pub or Attitudes. There have been some shows at Bubby & Sissy's in Alton that I've done a couple. And then there are various art galleries or other venues just depending on the, depending on what's going on there or who's the person hosting the event.

Interviewer: What goes into getting ready for a performance?

Brother Daniel: You want like my step-by-step or you want like a general idea?

Interviewer: Whichever one you feel comfortable explaining.

Brother Daniel: So, what it looks like for me is getting emotionally prepared. First of all, like I've been the most low maintenance person for my entire life so putting this much effort into my appearance is like really new for me. So, what I'll basically do is depending on whether I'm doing my face like at the venue or at home, I'll like set everything up and it involves like getting out a ton of makeup and just like spreading it all over whatever surface I'm on. And then there's like human person makeup and then there's performer makeup so I have to have like layers of primer and sealing stuff and then in stage makeup so it's like a ton thicker than you usually see. But just kind of just like- to me it had to be translated as like drawing lines and then blending them. Like it didn't make sense to me at all whenever I first started.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Brother Daniel: So then once my like face is all done, I'll usually if I'm painting at home I'll just put on sweats and go to the venue- oh meanwhile my partner is scrambling around getting all of my clothes together because I'm really bad at that. And once I get there, I'll be able to check in and get all of my stuff situated. I'll usually get a drink there, and I'll get dressed. Which, depending on the outfit, y'know there are some things that I'm just in like a vest and leggings and then there are some outfits that I have like a full suit and then a jacket and then a robe and I'm taking all of

them off at some point, so I'm in like four layers of clothing like walking around. But, yeah. That's most of the day of stuff.

Interviewer: Okay, so what would you consider like being the biggest challenges of doing drag and being a drag artist?

Brother Daniel: Oooof.

Interviewer: Just take it all in.

Brother Daniel: I think balancing it with your life as a person. As much as it's very, as much of it's based in bars and parties and drunk people giving us money it's also a professional realm. So, there are places where you want to take things in a very personal way that are not personal at all. And there are places that people are overly personal in a place that they shouldn't be. And there's also friendships and relationships that come out of it that are totally different, it's not like frowned upon in the drag community in the same way it would be in a workplace. But I think like creating those lines, because it's so based on the person. Like there are people I absolutely adore and they're some of my best friends in and out of drag. And then there are people that like everything that I know about them is their drag persona. I don't know anything about their life. And there are also like people on the flip side of that where I talk to these people all the time and I never like end up around them in drag. But putting all of those things together is so itemized almost. You have to do it on a moment by moment basis and learning those lines is a really hard process. So especially for somebody with like a lot of anxiety and sensitivity to me it's been really hard to navigate kind of what the social world looks like as a performer.

Interviewer: Yeah. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you lived compared to other places in the country or world that you've seen at all, maybe?

Brother Daniel: Can I read the question?

Interviewer: Yes.

Brother Daniel: Sorry, I've been- where is it? Oh, there we go. Honestly, I haven't seen a ton of other drag scenes. I think that St. Louis in itself is really unique because as much as we're a city we're also very small. So, everybody knows each other. Half of us have probably slept with each other, and we all are like that six degrees of separation doesn't exist. It's like two to three. So, with that there's also this intense history and every single relationship you make and everything you say and everything you do, and it's all very tight and it's all very personal. I don't know if that's different from other scenes, but that's kind of what I've seen, what I've seen is very unique.

Interviewer: How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression out of drag?

Brother Daniel: I am, I guess, if you wanna put like all the words to it be like an AFAB nonbinary man, I guess? I'm kind of still flipping around with that. Um, yeah. Oh, yeah. Expression. I dress largely like this all the time. No. Usually I'm wearing men's clothes or just t-shirts and beanies exclusively. So, like my presentation I guess is very stereotypically male, but what does that even mean? Yeah.

Interviewer: Cool! Have they influenced your drag at all, like outside of it? I know that before we started the- we were talking about it.

Brother Daniel: I think it honestly; I think that drag gave me the platform to realize that my gender wasn't what I thought it was. Which I'm guessing is not a, not an uncommon perspective. Like I've always known what does and doesn't make me feel comfortable but I've never quite associated that with gender. So, largely like being able to walk around as a boy or y'know half the time has been really- it was gender euphoria is what it was, honestly, it was like experiencing you know "This is what it would feel like to actually be in my own skin." I always talked about like whenever I was younger, and we would wear dresses or get dolled up for church or whatever and it felt like I was putting on a costume. Drag doesn't feel like that but drag actually is putting on costumes. So, it's been very, it's just been very much a matter of like picking out like what's Dani and what's Daniel.

Interviewer: That makes sense. How has drag impacted or changed you?

Brother Daniel: My family says I'm louder. I think I've definitely developed a lot more confidence. I've developed a lot more awareness of who I am as a person and how I'm impacted by things. And how-to kind of separate my persona from like my actual self. So, like you, seeing me out in drag I'm bubbly and energetic and charismatic and talking to everybody and excited to see everyone. And you could put me in the same bar 24 hours later without face on and I'm hiding in a corner playing on my phone. And those are two such battling concepts that I, it's really, it was really hard for me to place what it felt like to be on either of those sides. So, I think it's mainly been I've been learning so much more about myself both in and out of drag.

Interviewer: Nice. Okay. If you could go back in time as Brother Daniel, what advice would you give to your younger self.

Brother Daniel: As Brother Daniel?

Interviewer: As Brother Daniel.

Brother Daniel: Like-

Interviewer: So, like-

Brother Daniel: What would Daniel now say to Daniel in June?

Interviewer: Yes.

Brother Daniel: Oh, shit.

Interviewer: In like the 10 months, it sounds like you've done a lot so, I'm really interested.

Brother Daniel: Buy a hot glue gun before you get on stage for the first time. Like learn about costuming before you go out there. Yeah. And just, I mean, I've said this advice to a couple people, but I think I definitely would have wanted to hear at that point to is to just like be ready to hear criticism and then get up and do it again. I think that something with new performers a lot is that you want it to either stick or not stick. And in drag that's such a weird concept because some

people. It's not, for people it's not necessarily being good or bad at drag, it's having the tools and the understanding to get you from being a very clearly a new performer to being very clearly a like a performer who knows more about what's going into it. I had no clue what was gonna go into it whenever I thought it would be fun the first time, so I. But honestly don't think I would have told myself to wait. That, that was one of my favorite impulse decisions!

Interviewer: Oh, gosh. We've also answered most of question 11 if you want to briefly go over it, because that's a lot.

The question read "I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice-versa, how drag has impacted your identities. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities, such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc., and/or the interaction of these social identities, have impacted your experience of drag, and/or how drag has impacted your experience of this social identity?"

Brother Daniel: Okay, oh shit. Okay. Sorry. I didn't- aw I've been trying to do so well about cursing.

Interviewer: It's completely fine, we're in college now.

Brother Daniel: Honestly, okay. One of the things that's like. No, there's so much because there. In like older more pageanty forms of drag. So, if you go to like one show like Hamburger Mary's vs. like Attitudes there's two very different styles of drag, I guess?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Brother Daniel: Right. So, there's pageant queens and then there's like the more, the more modern take on what drag looks like. So, in St. Louis drag right now, not everybody binds all the time or not everybody wears pads. Or you know genderfuck has become a really big thing. Or people, people will pull different things in their art that aren't necessarily understood. So, one of the things that I had to learn really easily was like the difference between critique from somebody who knows your drag and somebody who's critiquing you based on pageant standards. So, I've had a lot of, there have been so many times that I've faced different just really bullshit scenarios because I'm AFAB and because I'm like bigger. Like first of all I- the first time that I- I don't even know what it was. I was wearing like too tight pants and I got critiqued like a couple weeks in a row because I couldn't hide the fact that I had hips. And which, under the category of the male illusion, doesn't fit. Which is transphobic in nature, but also, it's whenever you're thinking drag that's what they wanted to see. And then there's also like I think that as far as drag kings, people think that a lot of us are interchangeable unless there's something really huge separating us. So, for the handful of kings with like with bigger body types. I've been confused for almost every single one of them. Like, I have had people come up to me and say, "Oh my God I thought you were this person." for like there's a checklist. And most of it is because we are AFAB and big and haven't dyed our hair funny colors. And that's, it's been really like I. It had never, I had never experienced such like targeted dysphoria before as being called out for a long time about my hips.

Interviewer: Wow, yeah.

Brother Daniel: And I honestly don't know if I would have experienced it that way if I had not been in drag.

Interviewer: Interesting. It's another thing that no one outside of the drag community would really think about.

Brother Daniel: Right.

Interviewer: Yeah, so it's interesting to hear your take on it for sure. How do you define drag?

Brother Daniel: Art that plays with gender. I think that a lot of people try to define it as one gender impersonating another and that's not true because there are AFAB drag queens and there are trans drag performers and trying to put everybody into unique boxes and saying that is and that's not drag is really, it's dangerous. It borders on discrimination on so many levels but it also it pushes labels onto people that maybe they wouldn't have chosen for themselves. So, I think that drag is a very wide and loose definition but overall just most things that are playing with gender.

Interviewer: What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Brother Daniel: I think it's different for everyone. I think it's a way to make a statement or a way to make art that you also get to interact with people all the time and you write the script in a lot of ways like, you're not writing the songs you're lip-syncing all the time, but you are like, a lot of times you're picking your playlist, you're so in charge of what you bring to the stage. Yeah, I don't know. That's a very hard question. I hope that was okay!

Interviewer: Oh, no that sounded great. Do you think that drag is sexual?

Brother Daniel: Okay. I hate this question. No. I do not think that it is inherently sexual. I think that people add sexual aspects to it, which is valid and awesome, but I don't think it is inherently sexual. I think that that idea is very placed in the same category as people who think it's gross whenever gay kids have crushes but totally fine when they have crushes on people of the opposite sex, where anything queer is inherently sexual, which isn't the case. There are a lot of inherently sexual performers and numbers and people that can make sex into art, quite literally, and it's amazing to watch. But, it's not everyone. I literally, I don't think that I've ever been able to pull off anything inherently sexual with my drag. Like, if you. If you were to watch me perform you would very rarely think that I'm I don't I rarely flirt with the audience. A photographer asked me to flirt with the camera one time and I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." And she goes "Well, how do you get tips?" and I was like "I just grin at people." And for, and that may be the case for me, there are other performers who would feel completely the opposite but that's dependent on the performer. We've had a couple of family-friendly shows that you just put content warnings in place in the right arenas and it can actually go off pretty well. So, no.

Interviewer: I liked your explanation. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race? Are we still-

Brother Daniel: Yeah, we're still good I was just checking to make sure I was. I think it's a queer zoo for straight people. It's, y'know, there are so many transphobic plotlines and undertones and overtones throughout the show that it discounts so much of the drag world. And there are so

many other types of performers, or so many other people. I also think it, one of the things that I've seen a lot of commentary on in the community, like it discounts what local drag does. So, it's very easy to go up to a performer friend and be like "Oh my God when are you going to be on RuPaul?" I don't know, I'm never going to be on RuPaul because I'm a king but I'm going to be here on Friday night where you can literally just go. And, but that aside, I've watched a couple episodes, it's entertaining, and it's a reality show for drag queens which is, it's gonna be hilarious. I don't think that there's, I think that liking it is, or isn't everyone's prerogative. There's a lot of problematic content if you are looking into the trans community, but overall, it's TV.

Interviewer: It's always fun, TV. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be? Is there anything you would want to change?

Brother Daniel: I don't know if that's terrifying. I think that creating more of a spirit of positivity and general like affirming mentorships. Like there are sectors and timeframes where everyone or most people in this scene are very good at that. And there are other times that it seems like it's really easy to tear other performers down. And, it is, it like any performance community it's a matter, a little bit of a competition. And we're all fighting this battle together like we're all doing it together. And there are so many performers who are really good about taking someone aside whenever they've messed something up or just saying like "Hey, I realized that I did this in this number the other night and it really wasn't a good idea, so, like, I'm sorry." And there are a lot of times whenever things just get out of hand and I think that everybody's trauma and their experiences are valid, but if I had my magic wand I would probably wanna like I would want to just make that positivity be a little bit more prevalent.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Brother Daniel: Yeah!

Interviewer: Yeah. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag?

Brother Daniel: Mostly that it's inherently sexual. That's my first thing, absolutely. Also, that it's not dignified. I watch performers at least once a week that have insane talent whether it be the number they're doing or the costuming or, I mean, I don't know if you've ever rhinestoned anything? But largely you are taking basically toothpicks and gluing individual rhinestones which are like this big.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Brother Daniel: So, when you look at some of the outfits that are detailed and ornate with all of the or are just top to bottom stoned, like that's hours of work you're looking at. And, so that's another thing. I think people don't attach enough dignity to it because there's so much work that goes into it like any other art form. I also think that another misconception is that you can touch performers in general. There are performers who don't mind and there are performers who encourage it and there are also humans under those costumes that you're still groping and it's still not okay.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Well, is there anything that you think with all of those misconceptions that might help change that at all? Or?

Brother Daniel: I think the more people that talk about things or normalize them, the better. It's the same as what I brought back to my family, like, my, most of the members on one side of my family may not ever show up to a show of mine. If they did, I don't know if they would ever want anyone else to know that they did. And at the same time, they're coming to see me perform. It's like, I'm not stripping, some people do, I don't. But like there's, if more people were to make connections that normalized drag or normalized taking your clothes off it's actually really cool, and I'm really mad that I can't do it but like I think that those conversations the more that they happen the more people understand what the drag community is really like. And it's like whenever people think of drag shows so much of the time they think of it's your bachelorette party and so you wanna go to a gay bar or something to that effect and it's not exclusively a zoo for drunk people to go to and watch all the queers in their pads like-

(Part of the audio was cut off due to an alarm on the device going off, which was not realized until after the rest of the question was answered.)

Interviewer: If you could choose one thing you would want people to know about drag what would it be?

Brother Daniel: Pretty much any of the debunking of any of those misconceptions. I would probably start with don't think that you can touch performers just because they're there. Just because that goes anywhere from being rude to being unsafe. Also, I feel like I would just tell people to like go to a show. Cause it's honestly, I think people create these big ideas in their head of all of the horrible, nightmarish things that drag can be. And I mean, we have performers who really are like, they actually do really good horror numbers, but that's a whole different story, but like in reality going and watching what's happening and forming your own opinions instead of forming them based on this like really overexaggerated ideal.

Interviewer: Yeah! Well, thank you.

Brother Daniel: Absolutely.

Interview with CeCe Drake

To cite this interview please use the following:

Temko, Ezra. 2020. Student interview with CeCe Drake. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 28, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/cece-drake/>

Interviewer: Alright, when did you first hear about drag?

CeCe Drake: Drag was something that I heard about very young because there's actors, like, the original Ursula in Little Mermaid is played by a man and I was always very involved in theater, so I heard about drag very early on. But I never really understood it. So from a Broadway standpoint, I never really looked at it as crossdressing and I never really like to call myself a crossdresser because I think, I don't know, it can be deceiving and I definitely didn't understand it when I was younger, I thought it was really weird if it wasn't in, like, a Broadway production or in a movie.

Interviewer: So, your initial reaction, you thought it was weird outside of Broadway?

CeCe Drake: Yeah, I thought it was weird outside of a performing standpoint. So, like, if I wasn't watching a show, so, if I knew that drag was a thing in bars and, like, people actually performed on TV or just did it for the fun of it I thought it was weird. I didn't understand it. I didn't understand why a guy, outside of like, wanting to make money and be in a movie would want to be dressed up as a woman. So, I thought it was really strange. And I had that mindset for the longest time. I always said that I didn't understand why men wanted to be drag queens. Even when I first came out, and it wasn't until I came out and went to my first gay pride that I actually totally understood, appreciated, I shouldn't say understood, because I still didn't understand it, but appreciated it. Because I've always dabbled in doing hair and makeup on females, and the first time I saw a drag queen, and a professional drag queen in person was at my first gay pride event, it was in Chicago, and I was like "Oh my god! She's stunning!" and I kind of got more appreciation for it, because that's a lot of artwork, in my opinion, that goes towards it.

Interviewer: Yeah, that totally makes sense, I totally agree, it's not until you actually see it in person. So, your first time actually seeing it was in Chicago?

CeCe Drake: Yeah, my first time seeing it and experiencing drag was in Chicago, I went with a friend of mine and her and I went to the parade and it was a really exhilarating thing, event, for many reasons, but to witness, the parade had started and the floats were going by, and it was a Hamburger Mary's float which is a drag restaurant/bar...

Interviewer: Yeah, I just went there a couple weeks ago!

CeCe Drake: Yeah, it's super cool! That was where, the parade was, I think, for all ages, but it was a Hamburger Mary's float and the queens just like, one had their crown on, I have always been obsessed with pageantry and just seeing all of this made me want to investigate more and learn more. At this point I had never watched RuPaul's Drag Race, and I had never really paid

attention, again, up until, outside of theatre, of what drag was. So, after this parade I was walking around, and I was meeting drag queens and it was a super cool moment because I got to ask them how long it took them to do their makeup and some of the different steps. Even then, I still didn't have a good understanding, but I had a big appreciation for it, I mean, how cool, and I always love to see the side by sides of what they look like as males and as a female impersonator.

Interviewer: Oh, me too! It is amazing

CeCe Drake: Just mind boggling, just blows me out of the water! So, I definitely had a really good appreciation for it. I still didn't really understand, like, why they would want to do it, because at the time as myself I was like "Oh, I'll never be a drag queen" but I was like, "I think it's super cool."

Interviewer: So, when did you know you wanted to do drag, like, when was the moment you said, okay I am going to try this.

CeCe Drake: So, the very first time I knew I wanted to do drag was actually, um, our local college had put on the production of "The Little Mermaid" and the role of Ursula was originally wrote for a man. And I was like "I want to do this, I was to portray Ursula" so I actually auditioned, which, I had done multiple productions out there in years past, I had done like seven leading up to Little Mermaid, no actually that was, yeah seven. So, like, I was convinced that I wanted to do the role, so I got into drag. And it's not normal drag, you know, I was purple, and I had this costume on with tentacles on the dress, but I got into drag and it was actually very empowering. Every audition I had ever done for a show, I was super nervous, and it's weird because I'm not nervous when I'm doing a show, but when I audition for a show, super nervous. But auditioning dressed up as Ursula which is something no one really usually does, was so empowering and it took my nerves away I was kind of, it gives me the opportunity to get into a different mindset and really embody the character. So that was the first time I knew I wanted to do drag.

Interviewer: That's amazing!

CeCe Drake: And I still kind of categorize it a little bit differently because when you do a show and you're doing a character, um, a fictional character, I think it's a little bit different, because when you are a drag queen you can create this alternate personality that you can kind of live out while you're in drag. So, I still, at that point, like, "I still don't necessarily want to be a drag queen, but I want to portray this female character, this female fictional character in the show" and so that was the first time I knew I wanted to do some type of female impersonation.

Interviewer: Okay!

CeCe Drake: My very first time I knew I wanted to be a drag queen, I was a male performer, so I performed, obviously as a male in drag bars and male reviews, and one of my best friends is a drag queen, her names Ben Dovah Plenti, and she does comedy.

Interviewer: I love that!

CeCe Drake: She is so funny, and she does characters, she does like Mary Katherine Gallagher from *Superstar*, *Fembot* from um, *Austin Powers*. So she does these fun characters and she was like “Let’s do this Turnabout show” where males do female impersonation and drag queens do males, so I’m like “Okay, I want to do it” like, I wanted to give it a chance to see what it was like for my fellow castmates were going through. So, I did it, and it was the most empowering thing. And I don’t know what it is about, you know, you put the heels on and the wig on, but you feel like you’re invincible and it’s such an exhilarating feeling and that was the first time I knew I wanted, from there on out, that I wanted to be a drag queen.

Interviewer: Oh, that is awesome! How old were you?

CeCe Drake: I was 22, no, 23 at the time. It kind of took me a while to really convince myself to, like, pursue it, because I was concerned of what other, what people would say. Not really my peers but my family. Cause one of my mom’s biggest concerns, when I came out, she was like “Just promise me”, and I think that’s where, like, being uneducated comes from, is like, “Promise me you don’t want to be a woman”. And so I told her, “I don’t want to be trans, it’s not something that I’ve ever thought about.” And she was like “Well, you don’t want to dress up like a girl either, do you?” and I was like “No, it’s not ever really crossed my mind.” And so that was kind of a fear, that she would think that I would want to be a woman. And that was, you know, her and I were both still learning at that phase. I hadn’t ever experienced, really, gay culture.

Interviewer: Especially where we’re from, it’s very hard.

CeCe Drake: Yes. Especially in a small town, it was really culture shocking when finally I experienced, like, I had friends from Indy, and I went to Indy, and like they took me to all the gay bars, and they took me all around. I had never been to a gay bar, and they took me all around the city and to all their gay establishments, and it was very eye-opening, and I got a better understanding for gay culture, and sort of, like, the trans-community. And so, once I was exposed to that I was able to slowly expose my parents to that. When I competed for Mr. Gay Evansville I was able to have my parents there to watch me and there were drag queens in the room and they were able to meet them, and kind of talk to them. Like my dad even took a picture with them, and that was the craziest moment because I thought he would be so uncomfortable, and he was like “No, I thought they were real girls.” So they got a better understanding for it. So, when I do drag now it’s a little more understood by her because she knows I am performing and portraying a different character and it’s not something I want to live out as a full-time fantasy.

Interviewer: Right, so why do you continue to do drag? Kind of, like, what still motivates you to do drag? Why do you continue to do it?

CeCe Drake: When I’m in drag, like, each time, I can step into, like, I can leave the stress of, like, my day to day job and my “boy life” per say and be the person who doesn’t have the worries of their car payment, and all these other things and I can be CeCe for the night, and not worry about my boy life. It’s a relief and it’s an opportunity to perform, because there’s not tons of opportunity around where we live, or where I live, to perform except maybe like two times a year and it’s that outlet to be creative and get to do things I don’t get to do on a day to day basis.

Interviewer: That totally makes sense.

CeCe Drake: And growing up I always loved having Barbies and it wasn't because I liked playing with them, they were the most boring toy to play with. It was because I could dress them up and do their hair, and I liked to do that, and I could put them up and look at them. And so like, that is what I can do to myself now as a drag queen. So, when I'm getting ready and putting my make up on, I can make my face how I would want my Barbies to look. I can do my makeup however I want to do it, and then when I put my pads on it gives me my curves, and I get to pick out the frilliest dress and the blondest wig I can find and the tallest heels and it gives you an opportunity to kind of live out childhood-like curiosity. Because, I guess not curious, though, as a child I wasn't curious, but, infatuation, because I was infatuated with the glamorous part of Barbie dolls, and when I grew up, I'm doing hair and makeup now. So like, doing it myself, I can do it to the extreme in drag.

Interviewer: Right. Exactly what you want and looking in the mirror sort of thing. Like fulfilling to see you as that?

CeCe Drake: It is! So like, once you are fully dressed, for me, it becomes real when I put the wig on. The wig kind of brings the whole look together, and its liberating because you're that character for the night. So, my drag name is CeCe Drake, and kind of what I aspire to look like in drag. I always try to do blonde hair because I think it looks more flattering on me in drag, surprisingly even though I'm a natural brunette boy. But she is glamorous, kind of a Barbie, I always try to do pink lips and pink eyeshadows, and very pink blushy cheeks. Very feminine. I'm kind of a feminine male, but not as much as CeCe is. CeCe is girly, the pink dresses, and pink shoes, and the high heel stilettos, I never wear flats when I'm dressed up as CeCe because I think it's tacky and she is glamorous and has to exude glamour and elegance. And, like, I got my name from a friend of mine, she was a good friend of mine and her name is CeCe, Celia is her name, but she goes by CeCe, she was a hairdresser. I just love the way she carries herself, she is so confident and she, I just think, is very elegant. Just in how she- how her demeanor is. I wanted to kind of be like her while being very feminine and Barbie like, so I took CeCe which is also a character from one of my favorite shows, which is *Pretty Little Liars*, her name was CeCe Drake, so I took that last name and I took the name of one of my best friends and just put them together. That's where I found my stage name and you can give yourself any name you want but it is how you characterize her, how you leave an impression on people is how they perceive her.

Interviewer: Right. So, has that, doing drag, helped your confidence in your real life, like your day-to-day life? Like, after putting on drag performances, do you feel more confident?

CeCe Drake: Yeah, I would definitely say it does help you exude more confidence, but when you're dressed as your female impersonation, like when you're being a female impersonator, and you're dressed as a character, you don't have the insecurities that come with being a boy. When I am dressed as CeCe, I have a waist cincher on, and my hip pads, and my butt pads, and I'm curvy and more slim. But as a boy I don't have a waist cincher and have no butt. And, um, and I don't have big hips. So, there's more insecurity of the physical look because you're not as put together. It gives me the confidence, speaking wise yes, being a drag queen, you can be on the mic, you're

onstage, you're in front of a crowd. I have performed in front of 150 people as a drag queen before

Interviewer: Wow

CeCe Drake: Which is kind of a smaller audience for drag, but, I mean, it's exhilarating and gives you stage presence, and so it definitely has helped me with my stage presence and my communication skills. But it also, so when I am in front of people as a boy I can kind of go into that mindset that I am that empowered person like CeCe is. Because when I'm dressed as CeCe there's no stopping her, she's empowering, and she is a force to be reckoned with and people aren't going to overshadow what she has to say. And so sometimes you have to kind of find that mindset, while remembering you're not wearing heels and a wig, and you're not going to stand out as much, so you have to be a little more vocal and that kind of helps with the speaking aspect of the day to day. That's what's nice about drag, is, even though you have insecurities as a boy, those insecurities can go away when you're in drag because you don't have to be that person.

Interviewer: Yeah, so for you it's like, because I would imagine, for me, if I were to have an onstage persona, like, that's me too. You know? I'm still that person up there, so in my everyday life I can still be a force to be reckoned with and still be confident.

CeCe Drake: Yes. For sure. And I catch myself sometimes, I'm like, so CeCe can be really sassy and be outspoken, and so I catch myself sometimes. I would like to say that I am an outspoken person in general, but I catch myself holding back things that I know I probably shouldn't say in certain settings, but then there's times that I become passionate about something, and that's where I can say that CeCe kicks in and I'm becoming more vocal, and very loud about it and I have to remind myself like "Okay, you have to remain calm." In drag you can be as passionate as you want and no one's going to be like "Well she was being too loud and vocal." they're going to be like "Speak the truth!" like, there's no, you're not expected to have a filter in drag. Whereas in your day to day life you have to have a filter.

Interviewer: So, would you say your drag is like, more pageant queen or like glamour? How would you, what labels would you use to describe your drag?

CeCe Drake: I would definitely describe my drag aesthetic as glamour and pageant because that is where I find a lot of inspiration. I don't know if you follow any female impersonation pageant systems. I don't necessarily want to perform every weekend, because it's exhausting. But I want to be a pageant queen like I would love to represent systems as a pageant girl. I don't want to discredit performing queens who don't do pageants, because they are what stemmed pageants and performing. I love to perform but my passion is behind a system and winning the crown. Because it gives you, also, another platform to stand on and use drag and use that system as a platform to speak about things that are important, Especially the LGBT community.

Interviewer: Yeah, because you have more people listening, kind of thing?

CeCe Drake: Yeah, definitely. There's a glamorous part about winning the crown and wearing the dresses, and that has infatuated me even more. So, when I follow the continental system it is

primarily trans women but there are still female impersonators in the mix. The US of A system and the Miss Gay America system is primarily male impersonators, and so there is a glamorous aspect to it that intrigued me and kept me interested and pushed me to do it. Because, being in male pageantry has always been fun and I love the fact that I have won, I think I have won 7 titles now.

Interviewer: Wow, that's amazing!

CeCe Drake: Out of the 9 pageants that I competed in and I always, I coach girls for county fair and for like glam pageants and I always was interested in and thought I could do it myself. When I teach girls how-to walk-in heels, I bring my heels and I walk with them. And I think I can do that, so I am actually competing in my first pageant this summer as a female impersonator.

Interviewer: That's so exciting!

CeCe Drake: I am excited, I am nervous but excited.

Interviewer: Oh, you'll do great, you'll do great. You've been walking in heels, you're good, that's the biggest part.

CeCe Drake: It really is the biggest part.

Interviewer: The stage presence, it's a huge deal.

CeCe Drake: It is, if you don't have stage presence you're not noticed.

Interviewer: Right, one hundred percent. So, is there a drag artist that you look up to the most, is there one that you aspire to be like?

CeCe Drake: There is a couple, and for different reasons, one that I want to be like would have to be Ben Dovah. Because she, well, a lot of queens won't just donate their time, they want their booking fee. And she will go to the show after working a 13-hour day and drive 3 hours to be there for free just, so she can help an organization or charity. So, definitely Ben is someone, Ben Dovah is someone who I aspire to be like, full-time drag. For looks, I don't know if you have heard of Alyssa Edwards, she is a Ru girl.

Interviewer: Oh yes, I love her.

CeCe Drake: She is stunning, I think. She is a former Miss America who was stripped of her title, but she is a pageant queen and I think she is absolutely beautiful. So aesthetic wise, I would definitely say Alyssa Edwards with a little bit of Trixie in there because Trixie has a lot of the Barbie aspect that I like but more of the female look that Alyssa has.

Interviewer: Right, that's awesome. So have they influenced your drag? Or how you perform in any way?

CeCe Drake: You cut out there.

Interviewer: Oh, sorry. I said, have those three drag queens influenced your drag in different ways like with looks or with your appearance and stage presence, like, have those three helped you at all? Have you taken anything from them?

CeCe Drake: Oh, most definitely, so like I learned a lot physically from Ben, painting wise, he taught me how to do my makeup, more so. Stage presence I have learned a lot from Alyssa because Alyssa is very prominent on stage. So, when I watch her, there are things she does to be more noticed, and sometimes you must step on some toes. Which isn't, like, in my boy life I wouldn't, I wouldn't usually step on people who, like get the attention but, sometimes, in drag you have to in order to be noticed. But I think sometimes it can come off the wrong way and I never want to come off rude, and I think she can come off rude. That is something I don't want to take from her, but I want her confidence on stage. And like, Trixie, she does a lot of comedy and I think that is something I need to incorporate into mine. Because I find myself pretty humorous as a boy, but when I'm in drag I am more serious and reserved at times. I think I lose the comedy aspect, which, I think, a lot of drag should have. Because if you're not entertaining and funny, people aren't always going to watch. Looks go only so far, if you are boring on stage, they're not going to watch too much longer.

Interviewer: Right. As far as performance clothes, do you make them, or do you buy them?

CeCe Drake: A lot of my costumes I buy. I can sew, and I am decent at it, but I don't have the extra time, personally, to make my own costumes. I do style some of my own wigs, like I'll buy a wig that's not curly and I'll tease it and curl it and pin it up, or I'll just sew it in a bun. But costume wise, I definitely like to buy. And it's fun because there's all these struggling queens who are trying to make a name for themselves who are so talented with sewing and so good at it, and it's like supporting a local business and supporting another drag queen and I think that is important. So I always try to, costume wise, I try to buy from them. But listen, it is not cheap.

Interviewer: No, that is one question we have, like how expensive it is, if you are comfortable with me asking that?

CeCe Drake: Oh, for sure, that is one thing that everyone should know because it's sometimes underappreciated and that is where some queens are like, listen, I am bringing a \$300 dress that I just bought with \$400 worth of stones on it to your benefit show. So, I think that goes hand and hand with what people expect of a drag queen. They don't realize that, sometimes its tacky and gaudy and sometimes it can come off cheap, when it is not cheap. My most expensive thing that I have is probably \$300 and it is a dress, um, but my most expensive piece I am currently investing in is a pageant gown and I think at the end, after everything is said and done, it is going to cost me about \$700 which is pretty cheap compared to some of the things my friends have. I know Ben Dovah's Miss Gay Indiana pageant gown, she rented and she paid like, \$600 for, just to rent it. And so, hair and oh my gosh, hairs outrageously expensive but you need good hair. And so, most expensive wig I have is \$150 and that wasn't like, it doesn't have a lot of body, it's just a curled wig but its lace front and so it's more expensive but it looks natural so like when I put it on you can't see my hairline or if you can see hairline it just blends in with my skin. It's not

cheap and that's why, like, starting out you have to go to open stages and stuff to do these things where you're not getting paid to be there but you're making tips and hope that people are going to recognize the talent you are bringing to the stage. And so, I've been fortunate I started out as a boy performer and I knew people who opened a little bit of doors for me, so I didn't have to go to open stages, and they know I am entertaining, so they know I am going to bring something to the stage, but they just need to see a polished look. You just have to practice, and so, practicing takes product, and product takes money, so you have to fund yourself a lot of the time with your boy jobs which is not the easiest thing to do when you have other obligations. Luckily, I have a lot of friends who were willing to give me things to help me get started. And that's always the best thing too, some of my pieces that I have and appreciate the most were given to me by another queen because they want to see you exceed and excel in the industry.

Interviewer: That is so awesome, so this is just a question that I have, we watched Season 7, maybe 8, no, Season 9 of RuPaul and the queens are so uplifting with each other and I know that something I have noticed in previous seasons that it isn't as common. So, for you, has the drag community been very accepting or lifting up? Have you had kind of a sisterhood? Have you had any negative experiences with it?

CeCe Drake: I've definitely experienced a sisterhood for CeCe. People reached out after my very first performance as CeCe and were so encouraging. I think I did experience some negative, from some other queens, who were, I don't want to say they were calling her ugly, but in other words they were saying she wasn't ready. But I had more of an outpour of positive and that didn't even give me the time to think about the negative, because there was such a good outpour of positivity. I am fortunate enough, in the drag community you can have drag families. I have a drag mother, well, two technically Ben Dovah was my, she was my Miss Gay Evansville, so we had that relationship there, but she put me in drag the very first time and she is kind of like, so she is one of my drag mothers, and Tia Mirage Hall, she is an Indy queen, she is a trans woman, but she's been performing as drag queen for years and years, and she took me under her wing. She's given me guidance and she's loaning me a pageant dress, she is such a great person to have in your corner. And when you sit back and watch other queens tear each other down, that is something I never want to be a part of because at the end of the day that is someone's art that they are putting out for the world to see. Yes, they might not be as polished as the girl standing next to them or they might not be able to dance as good as the person behind them, but they're still doing something that they feel passionate about and who am I to say "Ew. What you just spent three hours on is trash." I would rather say "Hey, let me give you some tips on a way to blend out your make up a little bit better, or here is a product I use, you can have this, this is where you I get it." I've done that before, even just as a male performer, like "Oh, you don't have pants? Well here's a pair of my pants" or "Here's a pair of my shoes." I totally understand the struggle, the financial struggle, I understand time restraints, I didn't have time to run home and get all my costume pieces one time, and I got to the show and I forgot my bow tie and I forgot my cuff links for this pageant, and one of my brothers was like here's my cuff links, use my bow tie for crowning, you go ahead and use it. And I've experienced that with drag, one of my heels clasps broke and I couldn't buckle it and I don't like wearing the same thing on stage more than once, and this other queen, Vivika Darko was like "Come and raid my closet", so I went to her dressing room and went through her closet, she let me borrow heels. It's always an uplifting experience and I don't think I've ever experienced a negative performance before.

Where someone in the dressing room was just like, “Ew. No.” to me. I’ve witnessed it, and it’s just heartbreaking to witness, because you don’t want to see someone put someone else down, but that, I guess, is part of the industry too. And I will voice my opinion, but I’ll never want to hurt someone’s feelings. And that’s inevitable. My opinion is going to hurt someone’s feelings, and things will get heated, but I will always try to remind myself, like, I don’t want to be in their shoes, first, you know?

Interviewer: Right! So, like throwing shade and jokes is such a big part of drag from what I’ve seen in class. But it’s kind of like, poking fun at each other. That kind of thing, but never really wanting to make it negative and hurt people’s feelings.

CeCe Drake: And, like throwing shade in the dressing room is totally okay and spilling the tea, like, “Girl you look a little rough, like, let me help you with that lipstick, here’s a lip liner. Line those lips because they look busted.” but you can do it in a joking manner and then there’s like, not trying to help them and putting them down and tell them “You look like crap” and so I think there’s always that way, and, I hope that if I ever make something of myself in drag that I always remain more of a positive person and to give positive feedback more than a negative feedback. And I hope I can always help critique people in a positive way more so, and not in a negative way.

Interviewer: Right, and I think that you are aware of it and have a general understanding of it, so I think you’ll be fine.

CeCe Drake: Well, I think sometimes queens come into the industry and they don’t care about the people around they don’t care if they see other people succeed as long as they succeed. And they will do whatever it takes to hurt the other person next to them if it means them winning. And I can’t really remember. Season 9, do you remember who the girls were in Season 9?

Interviewer: It’s like, Sasha Velour, Shea Couleé

CeCe Drake: Okay, yeah, those girls were really uplifting and helpful. And I think Season 10 was, I don’t know if you watched Season 10, it has Blair St. Clair in it and Blair St. Clair is an Indianapolis queen. She was Miss Gay Indiana the year I competed for Mr. Gay Indiana, Ben Dovah was first runner up to Blair St. Clair for Miss Gay Indiana. So, I know Blair from before Drag Race. I don’t know her more on a personal level, but one of my ex-boyfriends was best friends with Blair so I kind of knew Blair in passing and through charity events, and Blair was at my step-down as Mr. Gay Evansville. So, I kind of got to know Blair then but Blair also went through a lot of life changes from the Blair I knew, so when Blair was Miss Gay Indiana she got a DUI. And when she went to film RuPaul’s Drag Race, someone leaked that she was actually not supposed to leave the state and that she had currently received a DUI. And that was a queen from Indy, that is a part of the industry where people get jealous, I see, when people excel, they get jealous, and jealousy fuels it a lot. So, like when queens win challenges in RuPaul, which a lot of it is edited to look more malicious than it is. So, that’s why I always encourage, so like, one thing I definitely encourage is, if your other classmates don’t do it, is go to a real drag show and watch the real queens, well I shouldn’t say real because they’re still real queens, but watch the local queens and get a better understanding from the performing aspect. Because, at the end

of the day it's still reality TV and some of it is scripted and some of it is cut and edited to make it seem worse than it is. On the current season I know Silky Ganache. She's from Indy originally and she moved to Chicago, and so she was a queen I met in Indy, she was really uplifting when I was performing as a boy, and I was expressing to her that I want to be a queen. She was like "Do it, give it a go, fuck anyone who doesn't want you to succeed as a queen. Or people who think it's weird. Show them it's not weird". But on the show, they make her seem like this really star hungry queen who is obnoxious. She is an obnoxious person, I was watching live videos of Silky in Chicago and she climbed on a mail truck and rode down the road during her number on a mail truck, hanging off the side of it, and it was the best thing ever. She is a performer through and through. But sometimes the way they edit the film they make Silky out to be this like bitchy person and she is not really a bitchy queen. That's one thing, like, why reality TV is scary. I have considered auditioning for RuPaul's Drag Race, but it's also, I don't know if I want to have that negative light shedded on me because competition to make people, more,

Interviewer: Like true colors?

CeCe Drake: Yeah, but I also think it changes you a little and changes your true colors to be more negative. So, I don't know. Like I was at a pageant as a boy I had, the guy next to me asked "Can I use your steamer?" and I was like "For sure!" it was my first big pageant in Evansville, and I was like "Yeah, go ahead!" and when I got my steamer back, it had an iron on it, he had melted plastic on it and said he didn't do it on purpose, and I couldn't use my steamer now. So I think things like that happen in drag, too. I know at a state pageant [inaudible] one year, this queen was about to go onstage and someone dumped a drink on her dress. Like, things happen like that, and I hope I am never on the receiving end of that and I know I will never be been on the giving end of that. I never want to be the person to ruin someone's chances because I want that opportunity more than them and I never want to be the person who gets my chances ruined.

Interviewer: Right. So, like, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race? Just like, your opinion on it as a whole, as the show?

CeCe Drake: I love the show, personally. I don't get to, get a chance to watch it unless I like, find it on the internet, because I don't have cable. And they used to be on Hulu, but they don't carry it anymore because it became very mainstream and they were not able to renew their contract with VH1 for it. But, I love the show, I think it gives America the opportunity to appreciate drag, but again I think it sometimes sheds a negative light on drag queens, and it makes them out to look like they're luses or they're just drama filled. And that's not always the case, some of the queens I've seen on RuPaul's Drag Race have donated hundreds of their hours and have helped raise millions of dollars for different charities, children's hospitals, AIDS funds. I mean, the work they're doing isn't always profitable for them, and so I don't think RuPaul's show shows a lot of that. And I hope that in future seasons it does show that queens are charitable. And I think it gives a good look though, on the process of, you know, becoming your female persona, and the performing aspect, but I also think it sheds a negative light, for the reality TV part.

Interviewer: Right, just to keep it interesting kind of thing?

CeCe Drake: Yes, and yeah, I totally get that. I was with a talent agent one time trying to do reality TV myself. So, I totally understand that you have to remain interesting and you have to do things to remain on screen to get your screen time. But also, I think sometimes the things you say and do, they can portray you to be dumb when you're really smart and it's just the way the TV has edited your words and what you said.

Interviewer: Right, so do you think drag is changing? What do you think the future of drag is in the next coming years? Because I feel like America, like half of our country is getting more accepting, it may not feel like it sometimes, but just because of social media there's a bigger platform for everybody. So what do you think the future of drag is?

CeCe Drake: I think the future of drag is forever changing. Um. I don't know if you have ever watched Paris is Burning,

Interviewer: Yes, we had to watch it in class!

CeCe Drake: Okay great, I think that's awesome that you guys watched it because it gives you a really good understanding of where drag came from.

Interviewer: Yes, I loved it.

CeCe Drake: And, um, I didn't watch it until I was 24, maybe late 23. But I watched it, and it gave me a really good understanding of drag and male performing and where pageants originated, and it gave me really good respect for original queens who made it possible for me to be a drag queen today. I hope it doesn't become so mainstream that it becomes underappreciated in the future and my fear is that's where it's heading. That it's going to become such a household thing that it's not as appreciated by the LGBT community anymore. Because I know, right now, that with the TV show, more heterosexual people are going to drag shows and it's becoming more of a common thing, and I know that a lot of people have mixed feelings about that. And I don't, I think if they're coming to appreciate your performance, I just hope it doesn't become a mockery in the future where it has become such a mainstream thing that people just make a joke of it.

Interviewer: Right, yeah, I hadn't thought about that.

CeCe Drake: and people have always made a joke of drag, and I mean, obviously, hetero people who don't understand drag are going to think it's weird and they're not going to understand it. And I was that person at one point but I hope it doesn't become a joke because of reality TV, and that's my fear, my fear is that RuPaul's show is going to make a joke of drag, and it's going to become a household, it's such a household thing now, but it's going to become underappreciated in the years to come because it's so, because people can access it by TV now, whereas you had to go out and you had to support your local performers before or you couldn't watch drag.

Interviewer: So how would you define drag to someone who didn't know what drag was?

CeCe Drake: I would define it as an artistic performance, I think it takes someone who is talented to get into the makeup. You have to, create your craft and you have to perfect it, and I think that takes

talent and creativity. At the end of the day it is a performance. You're portraying something you can't do, I mean unless you're a full time drag queen, which I think is an awesome career, but for me from 8am to 3pm I'm working with the public as a boy, and sometimes from 11pm to 3am I'm working with the public as a queen. And I think I would describe drag as a performing outlet, and an art, it's definitely an art.

Interviewer: Right. So how do you feel about cis gender and bioqueens?

CeCe Drake: I think it is all performance. I have no problem with bioqueens, I think they are just as important as female impersonators. I think they can give us tips as we can give them tips. Sometimes think there isn't enough comradery between female impersonators and bioqueens. I think bioqueens, and I'm looking at it from a pageant standpoint, I do not think that bioqueens and female impersonators should ever be judged together. Because, bioqueens have more the female characteristic than female impersonators, and sometimes trans women, and I think that's an unfair advantage in a pageant system. Generally, you don't find bioqueens being judged next to a female impersonator. But sometimes the female impersonator has the upper hand because they can have the perfect hips and the perfect thigh and the perfect breast size, and have had silicone put into their cheeks, and, so it is just not a fair thing. But I think I respect them 100% as I would the next queen who is a man, just with makeup on. I think they are important just like I think drag kings are important females impersonating men, or males, are important.

Interviewer: Right. So, what do you think, I just have two more questions by the way, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

CeCe Drake: I think the purpose of drag is different for everybody. For me it is to embody a female character that I have created for myself, so I can have fun. For me it is more fun, and sometimes if I'm like, "Oh, I want to fund this for myself" and I need a little extra cash, I will book myself somewhere and do that, but it's always been for fun for me. And to get to do that female character that I have always wanted to do. So, like, when I do my pageant this summer, I'm doing a, my talent is doing a scene from *Waitress the Musical* and I get to perform a song I absolutely love from that show and it's given me the opportunity to portray a character that I love. So, for me it's all about the performance and the fun of it.

Interviewer: I love that answer. So alright, last question, um, what do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag and where do you think those misconceptions come from?

CeCe Drake: The biggest misconception, and I dealt with from my own family, is that I didn't want to be a boy anymore, I wanted to be a girl. My own fiancé's family doesn't really understand it, they are a little uneducated to the aspect of drag. I think the biggest misconception is that I want to be a girl and I don't want to be a boy anymore, because I want to wear heels and a dress for a couple hours at night. And it is not necessarily that I want to, because heels are not comfortable, you know! But there's something about it that's empowering to be that person for a couple of hours. But the biggest misconception is that I didn't want to be a boy anymore, that I wanted to be a girl and that we all, like, want to be women, we don't want to be men anymore. I don't think I've ever dealt with any other people who don't understand, other than that was the reason they

didn't understand why I wanted to do drag. Not because I wanted to be a performer, but because I want to be a female.

Interviewer: So, what do you think would help change that? Have you found ways to help people understand?

CeCe Drake: I think, for me, it's just, you know, talking with them, for them to be like "Why do you want to be a drag queen, why do you enjoy it" so I can sort of be like "Well, it's because I like to be able to portray Roxie Hart from the musical Chicago, she's one of my favorite characters and this gives me that opportunity, or I want to forget my stresses from today and be somebody else for the night." But, I think communication and educating people, and I think that drag queen story hour is such an awesome thing, I don't know if you've talked about that much, but that is something that I think is awesome and I think it gives an opportunity for queens to educate to children at such a young age and families too, it gives them an opportunity to educate them about that. And I think that if someone doesn't truly understand, that the internet is a truly strong source, and a reliable source, to understand why men want to be queens. But it can be also be misleading sometimes. Definitely talking, I never have a problem explaining why I want to do drag, or why some men want to do drag. I can't speak for everyone, because my reasons are not the same as everybody else's, but my reasons are for the performance aspect and the exhilarating moment you get from stepping onstage as that character. So communication is the biggest thing, I think, to helping people understand.

Interviewer: Well I am so happy I got to talk to you today about all of this!

CeCe Drake: Yeah, I'm excited to. I hope I can kind of hear the final product of what you're putting together. I'll definitely send you my e-mail or whatever you need. I'm excited, I hope you got enough information, I kind of rambled.

Interviewer: No, it's great. We can sit around and learn about drag all day and we can watch RuPaul's Drag Race and go to drag shows, but until you sit down and actually talk to someone who's been through it, it opens up your mind more, so I'm so happy that we got to talk.

CeCe Drake: And you know, reach out in four year after I've done it for four more years and I'm sure I'll have more insight and more tips and a better understanding myself, I'm new, I'm what I would call a baby queen, and if I could open your eyes and your mindset a little bit more from just doing it for a year and a half, then that's super exciting and I feel like I'm utilizing drag in a positive way.

Interviewer: Right! So you've been doing it for a year and a half, you said?

CeCe Drake: Yeah, my first time was about a year and a half ago. I just recently committed to wanting to do it more full time, in my free time, so, yeah. So a year and a half is about how long I've been doing female impersonation.

Interviewer: You'll have to let me know when there's a show around, I'd love to see you.

CeCe Drake: Yeah! I'm doing some bookings for this summer so I'll definitely shoot you an e-mail with some dates and I'll let you know when and where.

Interviewer: Yeah! If you're ever in the Saint Louis area, that's where I live so if I'm ever back home I'll come see you.

CeCe Drake: Yeah Saint Louis is one of the places where, there's a drag queen out there I know, her name is TabiKat and she's a pageant queen. She was Miss Gay Missouri, America and Miss Gay Missouri US of A. So definitely look her up on Instagram, she's a really good queen and I look, that's another one I look up to when it comes to pageantry, because she's a queen that I think I could follow in pageantry and do well following her, her tips and her guidance and the way she carries herself.

Interviewer: That's awesome. Well, I'll let you go! Thank you!

Interview with Charlotte Sumtimes

To cite this interview please use the following:

Mickelson, Hayle. 2020. Interview with Charlotte Sumtimes. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 23, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/charlotte-sumtimes/>

Interviewer: Hi! This is Hayle.

Charlotte Sumtimes: How are you?

Interviewer: Good. How are you doing?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Well, thanks for being so accommodating on the time. My days are always so weird. I never know minute to minute cause I'm always on call. So...

Interviewer: That's fine. The first question I'm going to ask you, where did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Charlotte Sumtimes: The first. My first time experience ever being exposed to it was when I went to my first burlesque show, and I was 40 when I found my first burlesque show, and it happened to be at a bar downtown, and it was a show that integrated drag into the burlesque. The queens weren't stripping, but they were featured entertainers, and I never seen anything like that at all, and there were fire performers, and I just thought 'oh my gosh is this really happening in Saint Louis? How have I never seen this before?' Now, I was fascinated by the burlesque, of course, because they had all the shapes and the sizes.

Interviewer: I can see that in your drag.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah. Oh, for sure. And I saw, like there was this beautiful plus size woman and she was stripping, and I went 'oh my god I wanna do this too,' and that was the night my career began, but I went on to do burlesque, just burlesque, and I missed the drag so much that that's why I became a producer because I wanted to work with drag queens and kings, but I wanted to take it to the next level. I wanted to challenge them to do burlesque. If you're going to be in a burlesque show, let's strip. And your illusion is hiding. Now I am making you show. How would you do that? And so that, that was it. That's really my first exposure was. That night and bam I wanna do shows with you.

Interviewer: That's great. I love it. Yeah, I've seen a couple of your shows and when I've seen you host I, and now that you say this to me, I can see what you were talking about how you're wanting to add the burlesque to the drag. I've seen some of these drag artists use burlesque in their shows and it's fantastic. It really is.

Charlotte Sumtimes: It is, and it was completely unheard of at the time, and so when I would try to hire these queens I would just be roaming around Attitudes like 'Hey I really dig your vibe. I'm starting a new show would you do it' and there like 'Sure, honey, but it's gonna fail. No one's

gonna wanna see this.’ And so, you know, the odds were so against me, but I said ‘I think you’re wrong. I think this is going to be a hit.’ And now, especially in Saint Louis, it’s very common for a drag entertainer to strip. I mean back when I started at Attitudes, there was a rule in the shows, ‘no stripping.’ A king could not strip, a queen could not. None. No, no, no, no, no. I came along and they’re like ‘Well ok you’re not doing it in *our* show, you can do it in Charlotte’s show, but not our show.’ There was such a bias. And now, I mean, you can’t go to a show without watching a king take his jacket off and there’s nothing underneath. You know, it really had a huge impact on the performance community so, yes.

Interviewer: When did you bring this idea to, to Attitudes, or in Saint Louis, or other drag shows, I guess around Saint Louis?

Charlotte Sumtimes: This was in 2012. And yeah that’s when I pitched the idea to Attitudes.

Interviewer: Ok. I was just trying to get kinda a timeline, in a sense. So how did you family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist or producing drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: They thought it was just normal. I’ve always been the creativity wackadoodle of the family, and you know at the time I left my career to be with my kids cause it was really hard for me to have babies and when I finally got all my babies I didn’t want, my career was so demanding. It was in radio, television, and acting and a lot of travel and being away. I wanted to be with my kids, so to have a part time job, doing something in theater, which is what I think, I mean, it is theater. My family thought ‘hey this is fun,’ and no one even flinched even when I had to say, ‘Yeah and I will be stripping on stage.’ There like ‘Okay, of course you will be. It’s just who you are.’ But no one said ‘Oh, well, you know, you’re in your forties, is that a bad idea?’ Mhm. And my kids were younger at the time, but they loved it. My daughter had an imaginary friend named Danger Diva who was a drag queen, and she would design outfits for Danger Diva. You know? How many kids have an imaginary friend that’s a drag queen?

Interviewer: Never.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah. There’s mom with all the costumes and this and that. Everything – my look, my style, the way I performed – I was not accepted in the burlesque community, because I was lip syncing, and I was embraced by the drag community. So, that’s where I found my home. That’s where I found my people.

Interviewer: That’s really interesting. Did you wanna elaborate further on being a bioqueen. I know you were wanting to talk about that before when I talked to you. While we’re kind of on the subject.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. Sure. I didn’t even know what a bioqueen was until I started going to Attitudes Nightclub and I was there just went I started burlesque just because everyone said ‘you got to see the drag show. They’re so innovative at Attitudes.’ And in the drag shows I noticed that there were women, biological women, cis gender women, and I went ‘What are they doing! They’re just like drag queens lip syncing and they’re having fun and the crowd loves them? And they’re accepted?’ and I couldn’t believe that it would be accepted because of drag culture being about the impersonation of another gender. So, I had to investigate that further, but I found that, I loved that style of performing, more than just standing there quietly and taking my clothes off,

you know? I wanted to see if I could do both, so I would watch the top bioqueens in Saint Louis, and actually approached them for my show, and the top bioqueen said she would do it, and I loved it. Just watching her – her boldness and her confidence on stage. Oh, I was blown away. Just as much bravado as any drag queen I ever seen. That's what made me say 'I wanna do this. I think I can do this. I think I can pull this off.' But I did the extra step in saying 'Alright, there's already these amazing bioqueens. I wanna be bioqueen burlesque because nobody does that.'

Interviewer: Yeah. I say, I loved your performance at Attitudes.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thank you.

Interviewer: It's really unique and great. I love how you mix the two so well.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thanks. I miss it. I don't do a lot of it anymore.

Interviewer: Oh, you don't? I haven't seen you in a while, so I...

Charlotte Sumtimes: No.

Interviewer: I haven't been to Attitudes in a little bit. I just recently went back just a month or so ago, but before then I hadn't gone in almost a year.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah. I left. I don't work there anymore. I started getting offers from mainstream theatrical productions, so yeah, and to be MC, you know, so I really don't perform and do routines very much. I do have a show at a comedy club. And of course, there's drag.

Interviewer: Of course.

Charlotte Sumtimes: I mean yeah oh, God. It's a blast. And there's drag. I had to have drag. I argued for that. I don't, if people say, 'Go produce a burlesque show,' I say 'No. I gotta have drag queens in every show because that's just what I believe in.' So, I only produce one show now, but it's one of those shows that it's you know thirty-five to fifty dollars to get in to. So, my demographic has changed. My audience has changed. The people I'm reaching has changed. Where at Attitudes I could reach the young people and give them a positive message. Now, it's people my age, and it's a lot of straight people from the county because the comedy club is in Clayton. So, I work there. I work at The Boom Boom Room. That is a straight up burlesque show with no drag.

Interviewer: Wow.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you like that more than working at Attitudes?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I miss Attitudes. I missed, it was such a great time for drag because you know they had the three top show directors there, and it was always packed and innovative and fun. And honey I miss working with the young people. I really do, but I love the frequency of having twenty-two shows a month. I love that this is all I have to do. I don't have to have another job.

Interviewer: Right, I mean you're a mother. So, I mean it balances well I'm sure.

Charlotte Sumtimes: It does, I just, it's just at least I get my show at the comedy club. At least then I get my drag queens, but I only get two of them. It's sad, but I keep up with it still, and there's been a lot of progress in the industry especially for kings. So, it's all changed, and changes so quickly in the drag industry.

Interviewer: I did want to ask, where did you get your drag name from?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh, my goodness! My name actually came about; I was a popular blogger in the early 2000s and I blogged under the name of Charlotte Sumtimes. So, when I went to perform, I just kept that name cause, I was known around Saint Louis for the blog so why not just transition. But Charlotte is because the first play I ever did was *Charlotte's Web*. Also, because you know I love how people are so afraid of spiders. Something they could just kill in a second, and yet they have such power over people, and I'm fascinated with power dynamics. And I got spider tattoos all over me. I just think they're amazing, dangerously, beautiful creatures so. And then Sumtimes was the song Charlotte Sometimes by The Cure, and it's just kinda, to me the song is about someone who's trapped inside of her head and her imagination, and it just needs to be set free so I can relate to that. So, I changed the spelling to s-u-m because sums are numbers and I get paid to be Charlotte so that's how I came up with it. And my life, when I'm not Charlotte is a stay-at-home mom. So sometimes I'm Charlotte, sometimes I'm not. I thought that one through.

Interviewer: No. That's very creative. I thought the Charlotte Sumtimes was something about being a mom and doing burlesque. I assumed that was probably part of it, but I didn't know there was a whole back story to it.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. You're absolutely correct because the lives are so different and the people like when I'm on stage. And honestly, doing bioqueen burlesque is my favorite way to perform. Straight burlesque, I still do because I don't know. I try to represent that body positivity and age positivity, but I miss lip syncing. I miss being a bioqueen. I miss dressing that way cause, where I work now is more grand madame burlesque. So, I miss the innovation. Like right now drag is the most innovative it's ever been. And I see the pictures and I want to dress like that, but if I went into work like that, they would be so upset with me. They told me when I got the job, 'Tone it down.'

Interviewer: You talked about that one bioqueen that influenced you. Do you remember her name?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Isis Amore.

Interviewer: Isis Amore. Ok. It was question of who or what has influenced your drag, and we know like we said before we've talked about bioqueens and burlesque, but I was just curious, you know you were talking specifically about one.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Sure. And it was her performance style. It was her confidence. It was the way she commanded the stage and the room. She was never anyone's smoke break. It was 'I can't take my eyes off of her cause she won't let me.' And that was a big influence on my style as far as a performer. My style in dress had to be the Attitude's queens at the time, you know, glitter bomb. The things I was seeing there because it was all so, it was taking items from the mall or thrift

shops and turn them into these runway looks, and I was in awe of it. And it was such a fun time. Now, there's a lot of pressure on queens to look like the RuPaul girls who have you know a lot of money and serious designers who work for them. I don't know how the local queens do it, but they do it and it's just getting better and better and better. People enter the game looking like pros. And when I started, we all looked a little rough, but we eventually got there. Now, they enter looking flawless. So, drag performers have a lot more pressure on them now than even a few years ago when I entered the scene.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Speaking of RuPaul, we do, I do have a question about RuPaul. I mean how do you feel about the show, about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I liked it in the beginning because it seemed more honest. It seemed more about just finding the right representative, but the show became popular. The stakes grew. The star had to represent the brand. And then everything in a reality show, when you get a few seasons in, everything becomes a lot more structured and a lot less real because they have to keep upping the ante. So that's what I've seen as it's changed. I liked it in the beginning. It seemed like it was hometown queens in there being innovative doing their best. Now these queens are just these top designer pros and it's beautiful to see, don't get me wrong. It's just evolved into something I think is slightly unattainable for most local queens that don't have access to big entertainment cities. Like the New York City queens, maybe your boyfriend's a costume designer on Broadway. Well that's going to be a huge help for you.

Interviewer: Right. I mean Alexis Michelle in Season 9. We watched Season 9 in our class. And yeah you had people like Alexis Michelle who was already doing Broadway. I mean there was Shea Couleé from Chicago. I mean there was a lot of girls from a lot of big cities. And Los Angeles, you know. So, it's, I mean I understand where you're coming from in a sense.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Right. It's still entertaining.

Interviewer: and then they had like Eureka from, where was she from? Georgia? Somewhere from the South, you know. They tried to have, they tried to have some type of diversity in the regions of where they picked these drag queens from. So...

Charlotte Sumtimes: It is about ratings, and it is a multi-million dollar brand now so you know if the stakes are so high to get people to keep watching, these queens have to be more and more and more outrageous with their looks, so they have to get top professions. On the coast they've got access to not only to the best designers, but you know the shops that sell the best material. I don't know where in Saint Louis where we would go to find some of that material the make their gowns from. We just don't have that. You can't get that at Joann's Fabrics. So again, I applaud the local queens who manage to. They do make it work.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Yeah, no, I really agree. Just from all the shows I've seen at Attitudes. It's great. I do wanna ask you, do you consider when you were doing drag, did you consider it political? Why or why not?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I did. I felt that most, a lot of the shows we did, and the ones we would get in trouble for, really pushed it. Like right after Ferguson, Aiden Control did a number where he

represented the police, the victim, and the protestors. And it, oh my God, it caused so much ruckus, but it was such a beautiful performance and a great statement. And I know when I was out there, I was definitely doing that. I would push boundaries, but the boundaries I was pushing was about rights, LGBTQ rights. It was a big time of transition. Marriage wasn't legal yet. It was, we were still fighting for so much and we put it out there in our art and the injustices that we felt. And a lot of the acts I did, man I did, I definitely pushed boundaries because I felt like it needed to be said, but not just for the community, but also for women – you know for plus size women, for older women, and for all women. I just felt like 'Hey we need to be heard on certain things and so this is how I'm going to try to get you to listen.'

Interviewer: Right. No. I agree with you with your message, because I minor in Women's Studies at SIUE as well and I mean we seen like when you look at actors, like female actors, like even in Hollywood, you know by the time they hit 35, 40 they're being represented as grandmothers and the lesser parts. But then when you look at males they almost gain more as they age.

Charlotte Sumtimes: As they age. Right.

Interviewer: Right.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Right. It's just that inequality that I, you know, that I really try to fight. I'm so very, very lucky being based in Saint Louis and I think it is because I'm in Saint Louis that I've had the opportunities I've had. Would have I been as successful in another entertainment destination where the pressure is on for how to look and your age? Maybe not. And it is tough, and I do fight it, but I'm lucky. I'm so lucky I've had to transition more to being the MC, and that's because my body, it just can't keep up. It with the rehearsals and the demands of being a dancer anymore. So that's the one thing I don't like. But I still perform, just not as hard as I used to. I can't drop it like it's hot and get back up again. Those days are done. So, I try to put the message out through the MCing. When I started at Boom Boom Room, they didn't do, their MC didn't do that, but I did and wow has it had a positive impact. And the whole show structure has changed and the types of women they're hiring now has changed. And you're seeing more diversity and you're seeing more of the body types and that's good, but that's who I am. I go in and shake things up. And I often pay a pretty hefty price for it, but I can sleep well at night so.

Interviewer: How often were you performing at Attitudes and was Attitudes the only place you were performing?

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. I had, it started once a month, then they gave me a weekly show "Kitty" in addition to "Black Saturday Strip."

Interviewer: I remember.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. You remember "Kitty?"

Interviewer: Yeah. I remember.

Charlotte Sumtimes: "Kitty" was just fun. God that show was, I miss that one. I miss "Black Saturday Strip" the most, but "Kitty" was, I don't know, everybody just got along. It was peaceful one, but you know when "Last Saturday Strip" became successful, other bars started calling. So, pretty

much I worked at, I would say every drag bar in Saint Louis with the exception of Hamburger Mary's.

[Phone connection abruptly cut out, and then continues]

Interviewer: You were talking about where you were performing and how often you were doing that.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. Oh. At the time of Attitudes or?

Interviewer: Yeah, or. I mean, it's just to kind of give the idea of the person who is going to be listening, like how often you were performing. Like if you weren't doing it that often than some of your judgement or like your perspectives or you know things like that might be a little different than someone who does it almost on a daily basis.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. Gotcha. Yeah, I was doing, let's see, [counting five, six, seven] about seven shows a month that I was producing. Then guessing in additional ones here and there.

Interviewer: So, what goes into or what went into getting ready for your performance?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Ugh. God. That's the worst. The worse thing with burlesque was getting the pasties on which is usually first, and that's a lot of glue and a lot of prayer to get those things to stay on. And then it would be you know the face. You paint your face the same way a drag queen does, only you're challenge, I never went to the extreme that other bioqueens do – blocking the eyebrows. I just presented a more, a more of a burlesque face, but heavier makeup. And then, as I progressed, I watched those queens and then I would say I don't makeup myself as much as bioqueens do. Uh, always a wig! You know that helps with the fantasy. It's, you know, you're not going out there as yourself. You're going out as character and Charlotte was a character that never looked the same twice. So, it would be that. It would be figuring out, you know, the whole look head to toe which is what drag queens taught me; from the tip of your head to the tips of your feet. Everything needs to be thought about and perfection. So, what wig goes with this dress? What jewels? You know. It's packing. Packing is also the worse because you don't drive to gig dressed like that. Definitely not in the summer. Especially in the Grove where you're trying to find parking. It just doesn't do that. So, packing, I would say, is one of the worst, because you don't want to forget anything and especially if you're doing a bioqueen strip. It's not just the exterior, but it's all your under things. It's all your props. You know, it's such a pain in the ass to do that, but it's part of the job. So, I would say the getting ready process, the makeup took at least, at the time, it was about two hours. Now I've got it done to about forty-five minutes.

Interviewer: There you go!

Charlotte Sumtimes: I can fly through my face at this point, but again it's not as elaborate. You know it's not like I'm doing the whole drag look, but I've adapted, and I borrow heavily from the look I used to have for my look now. So, I guess in a way, my bioqueen self has been a big influence on my new MC look.

Interviewer: Alright. What were the biggest challenges of doing drag or being a drag artist?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Talent challenges. I would say getting the lip sync right. You know I think that's a big judgement being a cisgender woman. There really looking at you carefully, and they wanna make sure that you can perform at the same level or better. The pressure's higher on a bioqueen. You have so much to prove. So, I would say, for me it was the lip sync. I had no problem structuring a routine. No problem telling a story. And no problem with stage present. But damn some of those lyrics. And as you get older it is so hard to memorize. It's harder to remember things. I'm not even kidding. So, like these young kids could, on their way to the club, memorize the song in hearing it maybe three or four times. To me, it would be weeks. I would watch the lyrics, and I would still forget. Like there would be moments of panic. I'd forget my first line always. So, I think that is the huge challenge. If you want your mouth to move like the singer does, and you wanna make it look like you're actually singing.

Interviewer: Mhmm. Right. Right. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Out of drag, cisgender female.

Interviewer: Ok. So, you would use the pronouns she.

Charlotte Sumtimes: She.

Interviewer: Ok. Ok. Just checking.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. For sure.

Interviewer: I try to use that every time I meet someone instead of just assuming what their gender is.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No, and you have to these days. It's important.

Interviewer: So, has drag influenced your sex or gender identity? Like at all?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I would say...hmm. I think it made me more feminine. I think it made me feel like a more powerful feminine woman and appreciate my femininity and my curves and my body. Just all about enjoying being a woman and dressing up. Being an exaggerated version of a female. You know I can liken it to anyone who's on the *Real Housewives* franchise. That reality show. They're exaggerated looking women. And they have the money to do it, and so I sort of felt that way as a bioqueen and I feel that way now. And that's nice because in my everyday life, it's quiet plain.

Interviewer: So, you would say as being a woman has impacted your drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. Yes. For sure.

Interviewer: Ok. You kind of touched on this already, but has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. Yes. Yeah. Hundred percent. Hundred percent. Because you know it, my persona and I are two different people, but we're starting to become closer to being the same person. When I started I was not Charlotte Sumtimes at all. She was just the girl on stage. So, what happened was those experiences have given me that confidence to be more like her all the

time, and I love it. You know, since that happened, not the super chaotic part of my character, but the confidence, the self-assured part of my character. I like being her. Very much. You know I love the life that I'm living now is more Charlotte than it's ever been, and this is eight years later. You know this is, yeah. Yeah. It feels so good. It really changed my life a hundred percent.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time and ask Charlotte Sumtimes any advice to your younger self, what do you think she would say?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh. She would say 'Stop thinking you are fat. You have a beautiful body. Stop thinking you're not good enough, because you are. Stop going for less than because you deserve the best. Hold your head up high. Choose better people in your life. Choose better pathways cause you really are something special.'

Interviewer: That was really beautiful.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thank you.

Interviewer: I'm curious, if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or visa versa how has drag impacted your identity? Can you share about how one or more of your social identities such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc., and/or interaction of these social identities, have impacted your experience of drag? Wow that was a lot.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah.

Interviewer: We kind of talked about this already, but if there's any more you would like to say.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. It, yes. I identified at the time I was married to a man. I was a, you know I just thought of myself very much of a mommy and seeing and being in that environment with a young crowd who was so open and accepting of gender, sexuality opened my eyes to what I had been missing. I mean it led to the end of my marriage and falling in love with a woman which I did not think was possible. I didn't see that coming at all and you know throughout this journey then where I am now even accepting that my bisexuality that it really to me, and it's more of pansexual, it's really the person and I never ever thought that way before.

Interviewer: Until drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Until drag. Mhmm. Until drag and just being exposed to such open-minded people, you know that generation and now even the younger ones coming up it's so freeing for them. They have the freedom and the choices that my generation didn't and so I missed out and I guess I'm so lucky that I got to have it. Even late in life.

Interviewer: So, it seems that drag has impacted your children, your family.

Charlotte Sumtimes: It has completely impacted my family. You know they grew up with an open, tolerant environment. They are free to be who they want to be and love the way they want to love and to be able I think just to have them say 'Mom, I'm having problems with this girl I have a crush on' and not being afraid. I could have never said that to my mother. My mother would have probably accepted it. I just felt embarrassed or scared, so it's changed the way I parent.

Interviewer: Wow. That's really impactful then.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah.

Interviewer: In your opinion how do you define drag, or if someone would ask you on the street what is drag, how would you define that to them?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Theater. It's theater. It's theater. It's entertainment. It's, you know, evolved. It used to be about impersonating the other gender, now it's just about self-expression. It's so hard now to put it into words what drag has become and I may be the wrong person for them to ask because I'm not part of this new generation that has gone in there and said that 'No, we make our own rules now.' It's not the drag it used to be, and I think that's great. I think it's open and I think more people are allowed to get into it.

Interviewer: Right. I agree.

Charlotte Sumtimes: But now there's pageant drag and then there's alternative drag and there's singing drag and there's so much out there and in Saint Louis, we're lucky, we get to see one of everything. Like if you want a particular kind of drag, you can find it in Saint Louis.

Interviewer: Right. That's true. I agree. Do you think drag is sexual?

Charlotte Sumtimes: If the performer wants it to be, but at its core no. I think there are people who fetishize it. Is that a word?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes. I think if people do that and that's not right, but I think that if it's the right performer willing to get out there and give a very sexual performance what are they saying? You know what is the message of it? Is this a cis male who wants to show what she feels is the beauty and sexuality of the female? That fascinates me. How do you project to that? How do you tap into that? Same way for a king. You know, what is a king showing on stage if he's up there thrusting? You know being machismo and it's all part of the art and the community.

Interviewer: Are you still there?

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok. Sorry. I thought I lost you for a moment. It's been in and out, so I've been trying to find a good spot.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Gotcha.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, or the drag scene, or the drag community what would it be and why?

Charlotte Sumtimes: The one thing I would change is more money for the entertainers. It's a very low paying job for such high demands on your looks and costuming. It's just how it's always been and it's unfortunate. I would like that, and I would like to see more professionally produced productions, more theaters, more investors who would like to do things like *Drag Race* does it

and how they have a big professional production. I would like to see more of that on the local level, because the problem that you have in this industry is that it's peers controlling peers and peers controlling the access to stages of their peers and that's dangerous and that's why often you see the same people all the time and it's harder for new people to break in. So, it would be great if there were professionally produced productions for these entertainers with a director who has no interest in the spot light. The director just wants the best show possible. It is very hard when a star doesn't want anyone to outshine them in the production. So that's the debate and that's why there's so many wars because here's somebody who got a bar who let them do a show, now they're controlling the culture of that bar and that community and I think that's dangerous. I think in the hands of unbiased producer, I think things could change a little bit. I know once I started, I was my own director for years. Now I have a director and I have improved so much because of it and I would like to see a lot of these really talented entertainers have that opportunity. To have someone say 'Ok. Here's what you do on stage and let's correct this. Let's make this better or let's hire the best person instead of your best friend.'

Interviewer: Right. Yeah. I see your point.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think there are any, sorry, what do you think are the misconceptions that people have about drag?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I think the worst is that it's perverted. I mean there's still people who think it's perverted and disgusting and that's just wrong. It's terrible. I think they just think that...I also don't like that there's a lot of men who chase after drag queens because they want that whole fantasy and they're not seeing them as artists. I would love to see more respect for the artistry.

Interviewer: What do you think would help that or change that?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I think more awareness. More exposure. You know things like *Drag Race* has done a lot, but there really does need to be a show for kings. Yeah. I'm sure you're hearing that a lot if you're talking to kings. It's sad that that's not represented. And you know I think there needs to be more...you know when you talk to people who work in television who try to get drag projects launched, they say executives constantly say RuPaul owns the space, meaning owns the genre. So, until executives open their minds a little bit and they're open to other forms that would be great. I mean good for RuPaul, but I think we just need more exposure out there.

Interviewer: Yeah. I agree. We've talked about that in our class before too about this topic.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh, well you can bring it up to someone who's connected to the television industry, but I have so many producer friends that get to that level that they're talking to the networks and the networks tell them all the same thing 'We can't touch it. It won't work. RuPaul had a lock on the market. We don't want to take a risk going up against that franchise.' So that's why you'll see a lot of things online. You know you'll see...there was recently a drag movie that was straight to Netflix. Those platforms, very accepting, and I think that's where we're going to see more breakout things happening.

Interviewer: Yeah. I hope. I really hope so. If you could change one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Charlotte Sumtimes: That, at the local level, it doesn't pay very much at all. Those artists up there sending more money on their look usually than their making. They're up there because they love it. They love entertaining you. They love making you laugh and smile. It's one place on Earth that most of them feel most accepted. Free. Anxiety free and loved. So, it's so much more than a man prancing around in a dress. You know, just knowing financially, psychologically what goes into it and the rewards of the result, because none of these kids are paying, very few of them are paying their rent doing this. Actually, for most of them it cost more than it pays.

Interviewer: Yeah. It's interesting.

Charlotte Sumtimes: And prices have gone down, too. Breaks my heart that showcase has gone down since I started. That's why I'm not doing as many shows because I have a level of this is how much I wanna make and this is what I want my entertainers to make and prices are so low that I can't afford it. I can't offer entertainers that insulting of pay. It's just not right.

Interviewer: Yeah. We've also looked at some articles about is drag worth it you know? Is getting paid you know...some don't get paid at all very well. Like you've already mentioned that a lot of them can't even pay for their rent. They have to choose between their next costume idea or you know trying to pay rent or you know.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Without those new costumes and looks, you're not going to get hired as much so, it is. It's pressure so deep. Entertainers love it so much because right now many of them are only making thirty dollars to do three numbers. I just can't believe how low the prices are. Ugh. It breaks my heart for these entertainers and if they're even making more in tips than their show pay, I would be surprised.

Interviewer: I never knew exactly what it was like especially you know in our Saint Louis area what the prices and pay was like and things like that. I mean I know when I go to shows, if I like the performance I always tip. I'm not scared to.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. That's wonderful. Yeah. That's good.

Interviewer: I mean I feel like...obviously I can see that they put a lot of work into their performance, their outfit, their lip syncing. It's a lot.

Charlotte Sumtimes: It is, and you know a funny place and the tips varied of course depending on where you're performing some places just know you're going to make a lot of money in tips. The one show I produce at the comedy club is a huge tip venue. You can make more in one song than your show case for the entire show and that's a high paying show so it is worth it in some shows to get out there and really perform your ass off and then, of course you show do that every show, but there's some where you can have this elaborate costume and incredible number and make three dollars in tips cause people just don't tip.

Interviewer: Right. Right. Well that's pretty much all of my questions. There was one question I missed where if you were part of a drag family, house, or collective.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. Never. I never wanted to be.

Interviewer: I didn't think so because of the area, but I thought I should ask just in case.

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. I specifically...people asked me to form families and I said 'Oh god no.' Being independent, being on my own island is just where I want to be and I sort of feel that it gets very mafia-esque with the families. Families at war. It's fascinating from afar, but I don't want to be tangled up in that drama. Nope. Nope. Nope.

Interviewer: No? You don't want to be kinda like *Paris is Burning* with all the New York houses?

Charlotte Sumtimes: No. I don't want to get in a battle especially with a control family. Oh my god. No. Never. Never. Never. Never. Never. Never. I mean I respect these families, but I can't imagine having to control a bunch of people who are just as neurotic and crazy as I am. We are. We're just a different breed of people so.

Interviewer: Well, you're a producer and a mother, would you kinda see yourself as kinda like their leader or their mother?

Charlotte Sumtimes: I felt at Attitudes that people really did see me that way and that was both good and bad. I never had so many battles, wars, and problems with performers and they did in the Grove. Now it's so peaceful so right now, like at The Boom Boom Room, when the burlesque girls call me momma I cringe. I don't want that role. I don't want to be that to anybody because that's too much for me. It's weird though. Maybe it's because I'm getting older, and I just don't want to be called mom except by my own kids. And plus, you know I date such younger guys like I totally have a cougar thing so they definitely can't call me mama. Oh god no. Eh. No. Don't say that word. That's just getting weird.

Interviewer: Oh. That's great. Well it was nice talking to you, Charlotte. I really appreciate it.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thank you. It was fun, I liked reliving this. It's good times. Well, good luck with all of this. I hope my info helps someone.

Interviewer: Yes. It helped me.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Oh good. Good. I'm glad. Despite the phone alien that tried to break up the call.

Interviewer: Yeah, I know.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Weird.

Interviewer: FBI was listening on our conversation probably.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Yeah there like 'We're not into this drag at all. You two are done.'

Interviewer: Ok. Well thank you Charlotte again.

Charlotte Sumtimes: Your welcome!

Interviewer: You have a good day!

Charlotte Sumtimes: Thanks. Take care. Bye.

Interviewer: Bye.

Interview with Crystal Clear

To cite this interview please use the following:

Gipson, Alizeja. 2020. Interview with Crystal Clear. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 09, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/crystal-clear/>

Interviewer: I am Alizeja Gipson and it is the 10th of April.

Crystal Clear: 9th of April

Interviewer: I'm sorry the 9th of April, and then you are?

Crystal Clear: I'm Drake Stevens, AKA Crystal Clear, and yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so um when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Crystal Clear: Um, I actually first heard about drag I was on- I was browsing like reality television sites and all of that. And they talked about like RuPaul's Drag Race and I didn't really know what that was, I thought it was actually racing and all of that. So I started looking it up and started watching episodes and then I just fell in love because I didn't know this world was open. And what was the second part?

Interviewer: Uh, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Crystal Clear: Oh yeah, I forget, I already answered that.

Interviewer: And um, another question for you is, how did you feel the first time you did drag, compared to now?

Crystal Clear: Umm, the first time... the first time I did drag I uh I just absolutely loved it because it I finally got a chance, like, pull out, like, all the pent up energy that I had. Since I just loved moving around, dancing and lip-synching and all of that. And I just love to perform and this was a great way for me to just perform on stage and just be myself.

Interviewer: Were you scared at first?

Crystal Clear: It was more of an excited nervousness, it wasn't really scared. The thing that really scared me was... the first time I got into drag was actually last semester, because they were having this like lip-synching competition, Drag amateur Drag battle. And what happened was that they needed a last-minute replacement. And I, I had no idea that they were actually taking like students and stuff like that from campus. And so, I went to the host of it and he was like " Yeah, do have a wig, do you have a dress?" and I was just like " No, I don't have money for that. And so me, but I didn't- my parents gave me some money and I went to goodwill and bought, bought

like a cheap dress and nice accessories and the host gave me a wig. And they, they hired a professional makeup artist to do makeup

Interviewer: Wow, so I know that you recently just started doing drag, so you're not professional at it yet. But would you like to become professional in the future?

Crystal Clear: Um, I mean, as a freshman here at SIUE being a theater performance major, that is also a part of performance. And like I would love to do drag professionally, but I am still keeping my options opened at the moment because I don't know what I want to do. As I'm still exploring the world of theater and drag at the same time, which really is, they can go hand to hand sometimes but they can be vastly different.

Interviewer: Okay, umm so there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, from drag queen and drag king to glamour queen, to male impersonator, comedian queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen and camp queen. Among others. Are there any particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Crystal Clear: I would say, I at, at the soul root of it, I am a performer. I love performing, I just love dancing. I definitely, and not- I may not be the greatest dancer, but I can just love giving a show to people and all that. I do like, I do find myself being at comedy at times. Like just naturally because, I can just be naturally funny, when I'm in like normal conversation and all of that, or I can I can just I can do other things that like, I don't even realize I do those. It's kind of like umm Alyssa Edwards one of the more well-known drag queens. She is funny, but she doesn't know that she's funny. And like when I say something or do something funny. And people laugh, I'm just like "Wait, that was funny? Yeah! Haha." I don't- like I'm terrible at stand up and all of that but I am naturally just exert funniness and all of that. And I also, like looking... being a look queen and looking nice because that was just the way I was raised. I always look nice if I can.

Interviewer: Um okay, I'm sorry this seems repetitive, I'm sorry so what is your style in drag? Even though, I think you just answered the question. Do you have a style at all or do you just...

Crystal Clear: I don't necessarily have a style yet, I'm trying to still figure that out because right now, I'm trying to learn how to base makeup because you saw the pictures of my first time of me doing my own makeup, it was decent but not that good. So, I am still trying to learn how to, contour correctly and highlight correctly and to make sure I don't look a mess.

Interviewer: Who or what has influenced your Drag?

Crystal Clear: umm, Obviously RuPaul's drag race with all of the queens on there have influenced my drag. Uh, I have learned a lot of moves from people like Shangela, uh Monét X Change. All those people that are like drag alumni's from drag race, but I also find interest in like queens that aren't on the show. uh I'm just trying to, I always just look up YouTube videos of like how to do things and how to do this and most of the time its um drag queens that are not on the show. I'm also in a lip-synching community like a competition community that have a lot of drag queens in there and I always ask for advice there and they are very supportive of me, trying to get into drag and all of that and they gave me a list of what to buy and all of that. And its honestly, just a

combined effort because once you do drag you kind of have to reach out to people that have, cause you need help or if you need help, or else you're not gonna go anywhere if you don't, can't reach out.

Interviewer: So how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender, identity and gender expression out of drag?

Crystal Clear: Um, Well I prefer me to be a male and when I'm out of drag. But when I'm in drag, I don't care if you call me a he or she or all of that because I'm fine. Crystal is very gender fluid. There's a part of me that knows that I'm dressing as a female to perform as a drag character. But part of me is like "No I'm just a man in a wig" and heavy makeup and that's like kind of also why in theatre, I kind of learn that too. Where I'm, not this character but I am this character and so I don't, so I'm really flexible when it comes to being in drag because. Because of I... I don't care but when I'm out of drag, it's definitely male.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced your gender and sex identities? and how?

Crystal Clear: umm, not really... I mean I've always found myself, found myself being umm, male and all of that. It's just that I'm a little bit more fluid with that, but not technically gender fluid but like I... I really don't care.

Interviewer: And how has drag impacted you or changed you?

Crystal Clear: Umm, it really opened myself up to love communities that I never thought I would get into. I've always been stuck in this like reality television community that's kind of very toxic. Umm, at times and people are always more caring about the games and all of that but like when I get into other communities that are about drag and are about people who have similar interest other than reality television, it's actually a lot close. I have found my closest friend through drag and it's always fun to just talk about other things other than stressing about if this person is going to betray me. Um, and a lot, I have a lot of online friends and all of that. But I always get involved with people in real life. Like the GSA and all of that. With people who do drag or go to Attitudes or all of that and just make those connections and they also think it's maybe caused me to be more open to people. And just be more open about who I am, this is me. And all of that, because without drag when I didn't know that drag was a thing, I was kind of closed off, kind of pushing people away. Because I was afraid that they were going to hurt me. But now that I'm just unapologetically me because I was able to release the drag side of me, it was very uh, I'm trying to find the words, it's... it's just very relaxing to know that I don't care about people because I accepted myself and what I know what I like and what I don't like.

Interviewer: Um, if you could go back in time as your drag queen self, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Crystal Clear: Start earlier, I honestly know some people start as young as 16 and stuff like that, like, start as young as 16 and do like online competitions or just do or just post on Instagram and all of that. And I just wish I found it and started it early like during the summer or like even earlier than that because I could learn more and I could actually have more courage to reach out to more

places too actually perform there and all of that. Cause now I'm kind of feel that I'm behind a little bit, I know that some queens are on the show that are like a year into drag and that's like crazy when they when they have those beautiful looks and all of that. But I'm still, I'm just trying to learn with college and all of that. With college and theatre life and trying to balance that out and sometimes I have to cut time out from knowing drag stuff. And kind of sucks

Interviewer: So how do you define drag?

Crystal Clear: I define drag as a performance for uh a lifestyle in a way, it's... it's... literally a lot like theatre it's kind of too hard to explain because there's so much of it, there's culture, there's history there's all of that. And at the core root of it, it's just people being themselves. People pursuing what they love, and if then it means not getting knocked down because of it so it's kind of the way to define it is that it can be anything you want it to be. And I know that... that sounds cheesy and not like theatre um but like, drag can literally, you can literally do anything with drag it's just a base. And that base can cover a wide variety of things.

Interviewer: And what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Crystal Clear: See that's... that's a tough question because one purpose is very political obviously because you see queens that have very political meanings to what they do and just try to push the anti, but I think also, it also pushes just people having fun and people enjoying- and doing stuff that they enjoy because um I- I don't really do it for political purposes I do it for umm, I just do it because I like it and if it makes you happy, you should really do it. Uh what was the... Can you repeat the question?

Interviewer: What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Crystal Clear: Oh yeah, I was just ranting, and I didn't know when to stop.

Interviewer: *chuckles* No, you're fine

Crystal Clear: umm, I think I was ranting and lost the question. So yeah, there is the political side of purpose, there's just doing what you want to and there's just a performance aspect that's an entertainment aspect. There's always the purpose of another way, another thing to keep people entertained. And people loving just keeping people open and loving and all of that and just keeping people hooked. And all of that, it's like a movie, like what's the purpose of a movie? can be political, can be for fun and it can be for fun for the actors and all of that and can also be fun for the people watching and you just watch these people. And do things and its really quite, I had the perspective it's just really interesting to dove deep into what they want

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual?

Crystal Clear: It can be, I will not deny that it's not. There's defiantly a lot of people who do drag in a sexual fashion, or at least when like they have sexual songs. And it's kind of like a strip show, and all that, like burlesque and all that. But I don't think that its mainly trying to focus on being sexual it's just the character they are doing is very sexy, is very sexual. Or in other words, you've

seen season 9. There's a lot of queens that rely on their body a lot more, versus queens who rely more on their dancing, versus queens who rely on stuff. It just all depends on the queen and what they do, or the king or whatever. It just depends on the individual who does drag. It also depends on people's views of drag. Um, some people find it, for a lack of a better term, arousing to have drag queens uhh but some people also don't and just want to watch them perform and not be uncomfortable in an intimate setting. So, it's, so yeah it honestly can but, it's not the main focus of it.

Interviewer: And, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Crystal Clear: I'm going to say, I gotta admit that I admit that I enjoy it, but I don't think it's clear black and white. At least now and days of what drag can be, because you look at the queens who, are like weird, umm, season 10 it was Dusty Ray Bottoms who put dots all over his face and they'd read him because they don't like that type of makeup style but it's all creepy and crazy. You even look at Sharon Needles back in previous seasons who was creepy and crazy like crafty drag but it was still very pretty, very aesthetically pleasing, very combined. But that's not the true drag, because you see all the pretty stuff from drag. And that kind of affects too if you go to performances, and you see this queen who is a complete mess but purposely a mess. It's not aesthetically pleasing and its horrid to look at, but you can't look away. And you see that queen not getting that much tips because they are all RuPaul Drag Race fans. And it's kind of like effecting the way people see drag, it's like, and I like it. I like watching it as a show and its really fun to watch the queens do get out and all of that. But there's a difference between drag race and drag itself. And that's the key differences being that it tries to encompass a certain type of style of drag when it should be open to all styles of drag. From the, from like the complete messed up side, that they actually had a spin-off series called Dragula to the campy side. They focus on like campy stuff, true but like not like overly campy, that was Camp Wannakiki. But then they also have a busted drag side that they never showed because being busted is apparently bad but sometimes it isn't if you're purposely trying to do it for a reason.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community. What would it be and why?

Crystal Clear: See, being like starting out in drag I can... I can't really, I haven't really gone out into the drag community to get to know people in like real life and all of that. The only thing of people that I have experienced were people umm, people who umm, people online who are in the drag scene and who aren't in it. And I feel like, I don't know, I can't really answer that to best of my ability. Because I don't know much about the drag scene right now as it is. Because like I said not been out there and so one thing I think I can change is maybe... I really don't know... it's hard for me to think when there's really nothing that I had a personal bad experience with yet. I'm thinking maybe a little bit less competition at times, I know some drag shows have competitions and all of that. But drag isn't supposed to be a competition. It's supposed to be a performance for everyone to enjoy. And if you lose you might get discouraged to not do it again. Or, if you, or it could be influenced heavily on what you do and you're not being true to yourself and you're just trying to win. And I think that a good healthy competition is fine it's just, constantly doing it. Like the drag show last semester, it was very much a competition and they focused more on the competition aspect of it and after everyone got out a lot of people were saying that like " I wish it

was just a regular drag show for amateur drag queens, because that would have been more fun on us, for us trying to start out and that kind of puts bad taste in people's mouths about when performers do drag. And you've seen normal drag shows, its completely great and everyone gets a chance to perform. Everyone gets tips and all of that, with the, competed competitive spirit coming up and with competitions its really, it really changes someone's views on things.

Interviewer: Um, what do you think are the misconceptions people have about drag?

Crystal Clear: I think a common misconception is that there's drag queens that are transgenders, all drag queens are transgenders and they just denial and that's a very common misconception or like getting confused with the comments about like she-males, transgenders, transvestites, all the terms that blur into one about a man becoming a woman but like, drag is- drag transgender is very different. Transgender is um definitely um a man wanting to become a woman. Drag is a man becoming a woman in order to perform, but not wanting to make the shift. Some drag queens are transgender like Gia Gunn um, Carmen Carrera, all of those people and some drag queens are different genders- or just gen- * sigh*. Let me take a sip *sips drink* gender fluid and nonbinary, but like there's this very common misconception of everything blurring into one and they are just all the same and everything is the same, you're just in denial. It's just, no... there is a just a different case for each individual who wants to become this woman and sometimes it permanently and sometimes it's not. And you kind of have to understand that, the term transvestite is the umbrella term, and under the umbrella term it's the difference of umm... like drag, transgender and all of that.

Interviewer: Okay, and if you could choose one thing you want people to know and learn about drag what would it be?

Crystal Clear: I want them to know... kind of to explore all types of drag not just the ones they see on the television. I want them to go out to the, gay bars and drag performance bars and all of that to watch actually performance and just the pretty queens, the comedy queens, the kooky queens, the horror queens like you see on Dragula just open your horizon a lot more because I want people to have that view of just being.. just saying "Oh that queen is really... I can see what that queen is doing, and not because I saw it on television", And I also for upcoming drag queens, do your research and figure out your character because I actually.. like I have done drag like online competitions using doll sites and all of that and just creating my own looks through there. And I always had issues trying to find who my character is and if you have issues trying to find a character, don't find a character, just be yourself. Because being yourself is the best way you can enjoy your character. And you can use that yourself as a base to build off of that, for your drag persona.

Interviewer: okay so I only have like two more questions to ask you because I forgot to ask you this earlier. All of your answers were amazing, one question is, how do your family, friends, other loved ones received you becoming a drag queen or doing drag?

Crystal Clear: I know my mom is very supportive of it. My dad was hesitant but he's also supporting me, he actually came to the drag show last semester with my mom. I just remember, anytime I looked up during "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" that lip synch, the second lip synch I did. I was being a

little thotty if that's the proper term for it. I wasn't doing anything bad or anything, I wasn't like stripping or anything. But like I can just see my dad covering his face like this. And it was quite entertaining, and like I went up behind my parents because one of the lyrics is "My mother said whatchu gonna do with your life". So, I just went up to my mom and hugged her and stuff like that, and my dad was just like "What is he doing, what is he doing". so yeah, he's coming to terms with it, but he's very accepting. My friends all love me, and they are just like "Oh crystal is coming out" and all of that, because sometimes I just spontaneously dance or death drop or whatever, because like I said, myself and Crystal intermingle a lot. With personality because we are basically the same people. Um, I just don't know the reactions of my siblings because I haven't talked to them about it. I think that they would accept me, they all love me, and they will support me in whatever I do. So hopefully they do

Interviewer: And what does your drag name come from?

Crystal Clear: Okay, so I actually went through a lot of drag names. I first went into like an online um... I went into an online drag name generator because like I said I did drag competitions online with all sites. So, I needed like some type of drag name to participate because I'm not going to go by Drake, that's no, so uh I was first up Miss Hypnosis and I was just like mm that doesn't really match me, it seems very sultry and sexy and I'm not sultry and sexy. Um, and so I went through several suggests, I kinda went to one of my friends who did drag a show and also hosted some of these competitions. And I was think like Crystal Ball, Crystal Light, I like Crystal because it's something shiny and I find myself like a diamond in the rough and once I polish myself up I see myself as kinda like shiny, a diamond kind of confident and all of that. But then something was like, uhh she mentioned Crystal Clear and I was like "hmm I could work with that" and then I started thinking that I could do my tagline like "My intentions are clear, crystal in fact." And all that stuff and then like in that competition once I started finding myself, I started getting a lot further in the competition and became runner up, and that's compared to someone who wore the same wig all the time and not bitter at all. So, I kinda stuck with crystal clear for my IRL drag name because, I just felt like, that kind of just gave me more confidence in myself and my drag ability. And I still really love the name to its self because it's not overly sexualized that some drag queens names are. And I'm not really a sexual person myself, so it kind of matches that. It's very, sophisticated and glamour, if that makes sense, and I kind of want to be sophisticated and I want to be glamour. I can also be a bitch when it comes down to it like, at the um, last semesters drag show, I ripped a queens wig off because they beat me with a phone. Okay, so basically it was like the semifinal round and my personal round I defeated the queen easily. I didn't have to do anything, the other queen tried to bump me down to the floor and I'm like no. The other queen had telephone by Sheena Easton. Probably never heard of that song, I never even heard of it so uh. So, She had this big comedy routine where she's pulling out phones and pulling out a flag that says call me and so she has wired phones stuck to her and hanging out of her... this area. yeah I don't know what it's called because it was attached to her dress and so when I did the semi-final round it was also the Girls Just Wanna Have Fun lip synch, I came over and tried to like playfully flirt because I'm not actually flirting, it was one of my friends and that would be awkward um and so she saw me and came over and started playfully beating me with a phone because we are both theatre and we know how to not kill each other basically. And so, I was just like " Oh okay" and then ripped the wig off and everyone was just like shocked. I actually have a picture of that on my phone, I left in my dorm but yeah it was a very fun time but like just don't

mess with Crystal, and each time I get into drag with Crystal I develop her personality more and more. I don't ever think I'm going to stop developing her personality because if I do that mean I'm the perfect drag queen and I'm never going to be the perfect drag queen. But I'm just going to have one hell of a fun time doing it... and I think I lost the question again.

Interviewer: it was where does your drag name come from?

Crystal Clear: oh yeah, I just lost the question, I just rant. But yeah that's how mostly my drag name came, and I don't think that if you were to ask me if I will ever change it I think that's no because I know that some queens change their names like, Miz Cracker from season 10 was originally Brianna Cracker and I don't why she changed, it just said she changed it, and some people drop or add to their name. Like we have Trinity Taylor, drop the Taylor and add Trinity the Tuck. Um some people just go by one word now, like there was Shangela Laquifa Wadley, people call her Shangela. All of that stuff that they feel like feel like they drop it, but I don't think I'm ever going to add to Crystal or drop Crystal or whatever. I think it's a perfect name for me. because it matches me and my personality, it just matches everything that I search for when I perform as a drag queen.

Interviewer: Okay, well that concludes our interview. Thank you for your time.

Interview with Diana Tunnel

To cite this interview please use the following:

McKeehan, Sam. 2020. Interview with Diana Tunnel. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 24, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/diana-tunnel/>

Interviewer: When did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, so I grew up in a really like, conservative, small town in Kentucky. Um, I never really like... I guess I had a concept of what drag was, but I didn't really have any interaction with it until I was a freshman in college. Um, and a lot of my friends were going to Nashville because we lived about two hours outside of Nashville. Okay. So, they were all gonna go to this nightclub and it was 18 and up so I could get in. Uh, so I hopped in a car and went down with them and it was the first time I ever saw a drag queen in real life. Um, and it was actually Sara Andrews, uh, who used to perform in Chicago and just recently moved back to Nashville.

Interviewer: Awesome. Wow. Awesome. When did you first, when did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, I started performing about two years ago. Uh, it was April 2017. Um, I had a really big appreciation for a drag, but I actually moved to Chicago with my partner. Um, just out of college. Uh, I was looking for work in theater as a wig tech or hair and makeup artist and I just wasn't finding any work. Um, so this was just kind of a way for me to use my skills and I was just kind of, you know, if I wasn't getting a job in theater then I was going to make my own theater. Uh, so it, kind of just started as, uh, me going to a competition down the road and putting on some elf make-up. Um, um, it was not a cute moment. I can verify if you scroll thought far enough down on my Instagram, there's a picture of me that night and it's absolutely terrible.

Interviewer: Do you find it difficult for you to like, was it hard at first to like, get all the makeup right and stuff like that?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, yeah, even being trained as a makeup artist, like there was just such a disconnect of doing something so specific really well. Um, luckily Chicago is such a tight knit group of performers and um, in my experience, the drag scene here has been so welcoming. So, a lot of people were willing to impart some wisdom or um, yeah, give some advice or you know, I was getting ready next to somebody and I saw them using a product that I hadn't seen. Um, people were willing to tell me about that product or you know, let me know how it worked for them so I can go get it and try it out.

Interviewer: All right. Um, how did you family friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Diana Tunnel: Um, so my sisters told my biological mom, so my sisters and my biological mom know. But my parents, I was raised by my dad and my step-mom, they, uh, do not know that I'm a drag queen.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Diana Tunnel: So, they have not received it.

Interviewer: Very interesting. So why don't they know?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I was raised in a really conservative, uh, environment. Okay. So, while, like my parents know that I have a partner and they love him and they're very open about me being gay. Uh, that even took a long time to get around. So yeah. Um, I think, you know, taking the step between "I'm in a long-term relationship with another man" to "My job is dressing up as a woman" might be a big step for them to accept.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, this is a fun one. Um, where does your drag name come from?

Diana Tunnel: So, um, I kind of planned out like my first night in drag. It wasn't anything that was super impulsive. Like I knew that I was going to um, do this competition. I decided like a week before that I was going to do it. So, like I was planning on stuff and I hadn't settled on a drag name and I was like down to the night before and I was like, I don't have a drag name to like, tell them when I get there. And I was talking to somebody, um, just outside of Berlin smoking a cigarette and I was talking about like how I had no idea it was actually my drag name was going to be Margot Rita. And he was like, no, that's terrible. That's an awful name. And he was like, here's one for free. Um, and he told me, and he said the name Diana Tunnel. And I thought it was so kind of shocking to hear the for like when you originally hear it, it's kind of a little bit of a shock because it's so kind of inappropriate. Yeah. But I love politics. I love conspiracy theories. Um, and I love a good political assassination, I guess, so... but it was so funny, and it has kind of a double meaning, so I can, I joked that I can always tell when you're born based on how you hear my name. Cause most people will say, oh, it's like "die-in-a-tunnel". And I'm like, I mean, yeah, like that's part of it. I was like, but if you're from the 90s, like it's like the princess and where she died. Mine's really dark.

Interviewer: I love it (laughs).

Diana Tunnel: But it's fun, various people don't like it at all.

Interviewer: Uh, that's, that's hilarious. Okay. Um, there are a lot of terms, for types and styles of drag from drag queen and drag king to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist's, bioqueen and camp queen. among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do?

Diana Tunnel: Well, so when I started, I was can, I was going to be the next Alaska or Adore or someone like that, um, which I didn't really have a name for that type of drag. Um, I think I jokingly call that trashy drag. Um, and that didn't actually like go away. But, um, now I have referred myself as a cowgirl princess. Um, all my, all the music I perform is primarily country music unless I just really want to perform something else.

Interviewer: Oh, Okay.

Diana Tunnel: But, um, no, I change, I don't know that I can put myself in any of those boxes necessarily. Um, I know a lot of performers find comfort in that, um, and being able to define what they do in a specific way. Uh, like a lot of queens will call, you know, specifically say that they're pageant queens. Um, even if, you know, I mean, you can still catch them in the club performing, but that's primarily what they're interested in. Um, I never really had like a specific thing that I wanted to fall into. Like I can't really call myself campy, cause, I don't like, have a character around what I do. Um, I would not say I'm glamorous. I'm not poised enough to be glamorous uh, but yeah, I don't, I don't know if I specifically have a label, but, um, I do know a lot of people who do prescribe those labels and it's a way for them to kind of explain what they do. I hope that answers that question.

Interviewer: Oh, it does. Yeah, you're good. Okay. Uh, we may have covered this, but who or what has influenced your drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I originally, like I said, I wanted to be like this idea I had of Alaska or, you know, yeah. It's kind of the funk trashy persona. Um, but that changed a lot. I got really homesick because I had just moved to Chicago, and it was the farthest I had ever been away from my parents. Um, but I went to college, it was just a town over so I could always just drive back home and see them if I wanted to. So, um, I got really homesick and I was raised on country music. I was never really super interested in it, um, but it listening to country music and then performing country music reminded me of my mom and maybe feel closer to her. So that's kind of what really influenced.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Diana Tunnel: What my drag is currently is, uh, it's a lot of my mom.

Interviewer: All right. Um, do you consider your drag political?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I don't consider my drag political too often. I think, um, one of the best influences have on that as Dolly Parton who refuses to discuss politics around her art. (laughs) But not that I'm not a political person. And if you scroll through my Facebook, you can definitely find some opinions.

Interviewer: Alright

Diana Tunnel: I tried to leave that out of the club. I think everyone's out to have a good time and sometimes it's just not necessary to make a statement.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense. Okay. So, are you willing to talk about, these might be more, a little more personal questions, um, as your life has a drag artist? So, yeah. So, like this the first, the first question here is, are you part of a drag family, house, or collective?

Diana Tunnel: Um, No I did have a... I guess I do or did have a drag mother depending on how you look at it. Um, there was a person [name illegible] who was helping me uh, who really helped me out when I started drag and um, everything from getting me dresses and jewelry or um, helping

me with my makeup. So, I mean I did have a guiding influence. Um, and I refer to her as my drag mother essentially moved in. Um, we don't see her as much anymore, but I do definitely appreciate everything. She did help me get started out, cause I started with one dress and one wig.

Interviewer: How often do you perform and where do you perform?

Diana Tunnel: Um, so I have a weekly booking as a stage manager for a competition here. Uh, that happens every Monday night. Um, and that's at like 2 am. So that's one of my weekly bookings. I also host a RuPaul's drag race viewing party for Hamburger Mary's Chicago, which is also weekly. And then I have a new monthly they show happening in Mary's Attic, which is called The Hoe Down. Um, And so that's my new monthly country show. So those are my like regular bookings. And then just whenever somebody wants to book me a yeehaw around their stage.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, what goes into getting ready for performance?

Diana Tunnel: Um, depending on the show, some shows have like a specific theme that you really have to take time and figure out what you're doing and, uh, conceptualize a performance. Um, so sometimes a show may take me weeks to prepare for uh, where I'm really trying to cater a performance to that and cater a stunts and tricks that I'm going to do. Yeah. Whereas usually Monday nights, it's kind of on a whim. Uh, so it takes me about two hours to get in makeup and hair and everything. And then, um, I'm usually picking a song like 20 minutes before or we get on stage.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, what are your biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I think the biggest challenge for me is definitely, um, getting stale. Uh, and what I'm doing just kind of, I go through a period and I think this happens to a lot of artists were um, doing it every week. I just kind of get an inspired are there those days where I just, I don't want to do the makeup and everything. Uh, which those are the most important days to do it. Is when you don't want to.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or the world?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I don't have too much experience in a lot of other drag scenes. Um, but I do know a lot of people, uh, around the country who do drag. And I think what makes Chicago so unique is that, um, there really is a lot of upward mobility. There's opportunity to succeed. Yeah. It's not this No one biting and scratching at each other to succeed here. Um, there's room for everyone to find their place and to do well as long as you want to put in the work to do well.

Interviewer: Would you consider Chicago your ideal place to do drag?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, yeah, I definitely do. Um, like I said, I know people in other cities, so like, um, a lot of queens in Denver have really good relationships with a lot of the queens in Chicago for whatever reason that is. But I always joke about the romance between Chicago and Denver. I love performing in other cities and getting to know people and getting to meet new people. But, um, I'm really glad that Chicago is my home because everyone here is just a part of each other

and, um, a lot of the more successful or established queens also like show support and try to help newer queens.

Interviewer: That's cool. All right, so this is going to get a little more personal. Um, how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression out of drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, out of drag, I do identify as a cis male, but as far as pronouns, um, when I'm asked, I generally prefer he/him, but also, um, it really doesn't matter to me. A lot of drag queens, even out of drag refer, like address each other by our drag names or she/her pronouns. So, um, I've learned a lot about gender since doing drag and since moving to Chicago. Um, as far as my idea of what gender is or how strict of lines there are for that I guess, I definitely think I have a lot more fluid or comfortable, um, with my gender than I was before I started experiencing this world.

Interviewer: Interesting. Okay. So, we already covered pronouns, um, has drag influence your sex and gender identities?

Diana Tunnel: Um, yeah, I think I has, um, like I said, not to say that I don't identify as a cis male, um, but my comfortability in wearing more feminine clothing and daily life, um, or just the way I view myself, um, isn't so much that, you know, I have to show off and ask you run it again public or anything like that. I don't have to be society's idea of what a man is. I can be my own type of man.

Interviewer: Okay. And then this is like the opposite. Have you have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Diana Tunnel: um, I don't know that it has. I think Diana is definitely a creation of like what I think, if I were a woman, what I think I'd want to be as a woman. Um, which is, you know, delightfully unrefined.

Interviewer: How has your drag impacted or changed you?

Diana Tunnel: Uh, I've learned so much from doing drag. Um, I think it's made me so much more comfortable talking to people. Um, and it's definitely helped me stand up for myself. Um, you deal with a lot of people kind of invading your personal space when you're in drag, And it's a kind of different type of vulnerability because even though like most of my body is not actually my body, a lot of pads covered by a lot of tights people still will and have tried to, you know, grab my ass and like my ass is made of foam. I start miles beneath there. Just the sentiment behind it or the action of somebody doing that to you is so... puts you in a really vulnerable place. So, I've really learned to stand up for myself, um, and make sure that I'm being heard and make sure I'm coming through clear and that definitely transfers over into my everyday life.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, if you could go back in time as you're a drag persona, what advice would you give yourself? Like your younger self?

Diana Tunnel: Oh, spend the money on good makeup and blend. (laughs) Um, no, I honestly wouldn't change anything. I taught myself to be confident and uh, put myself out there. It takes time to

learn to do drag. And I don't think anybody started out pretty. Um, but yeah, I think I'd be more confident in my faults. Um, and let those improve over time.

Interviewer: Okay. There's another question that we may have covered, but, um, can you share about how one of your more social identities such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc., and or the interaction of those social identities have impacted your experience of drag, I know, or how your drag was impacted. Um, how has impacted your experience of this social identity? You get that?

Diana Tunnel: Yeah. Okay. I think so. Yeah. (laughs) So like I said, I primarily do country music and I'm from a very conservative area. Um, but when I tell people where I'm from, it's always not what this like sympathy I guess. Uh, you know, people have immediate responses always. When I say I'm from Kentucky, they're like, oh, I'm so sorry. Um, and I'm not like, I, um, in my experience, people are accepting of things when they, realize they know somebody who connects with it. Um, okay. Plenty of people hate gay people until they realize they know gay people and that's transferred over because listening to more country music and familiarizing myself with it. Um, I think there's this idea that it's a bunch of intolerant Republicans picking banjos. Um, and when I can definitely tell you is at least with female country music, there's so much power and feminism that goes into that. And um, the songs are really about taking control of the woman and taking ownership of yourself. Um, so there's a whole different side of this southern ideal of living, um, other than just the conservatism that we automatically think of. So, I think it's really changed the way I think of where I'm from and uh, the people I grew up with.

Interviewer: All right. Thank you. Um, how do you define drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um Before I started drag, I would have defined it kind of how what we see on RuPaul's Drag Race, its men who dress as women. And that's for a long time, that was what I really thought staunchly. Um, and there's still is some disconnect on gender identity and doing drag, um, which I'm sure you've seen a lot of people have seen in the news. RuPaul's refusal to, uh, allow post-op trans queens or AFAB queens assigned female at birth queens. Um, since I've started drag and I've really become part of this world, I can tell you that there is no definition of drag. There's no definite you have to be this or that to be a drag queen. Um, there are so many performers do I think our that are on a whole other level that I am like, they're incredible. Um, I think drag is just an expression of gender or an exaggeration of gender. Um, in whatever way you want to perceive that.

Interviewer: All right. Um, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I think primarily its purpose for entertainment, especially in our society. Um, going back through history, women have been posing as men since we've had recorded history. Yeah. And you know, in the past it's been sort of necessity, or, um, either to hide or save themselves, uh, sometimes for survival. Uh, and then of course I think men dressing in drag is always widely then, for entertainment purposes or just self-expression. Um, but currently I'd say it's definitely just for entertainment and having fun and expressing yourself in a way that maybe you can't in everyday life.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual?

Diana Tunnel: I think drag can be sexual, but, um, I don't think that's its main purpose. Um, I've actually had the opportunity to do drag queen story times and

Interviewer: that's cool.

Diana Tunnel: a lot of my friends doing shows that are specifically geared towards children. Um, and I think the great thing about that is showing these kids that, you know, and I think also showing adults, that there can be two sides of something. You know, the way I perform in a nightclub is definitely going to be different in the way I perform for children. But I can do both and just like, we can make sitcoms for kids and we also have sitcoms for adults. It's often sometimes the same actors on them.

Interviewer: Um, do you think drag is political?

Diana Tunnel: I definitely think drag is political. Um, especially in the political climate we currently have. Um, we have an administration that is so hell bent on keeping the status quo what it is and creating a narrative of LGBT people as depraved and as lesser than. So, I think doing something like drag and so important right now because it's something conservative people in general can't wrap their head around or they have this terrible notion. And I think the more we put it out there, the more we show people that this is just entertainment. This is just someone's art and it's not something to be afraid of. It's not something to be angry about. Um, but the more we create that conversation the more it's being had, and the more mind clutter changed. Um, staying quiet about an issue is never going to change anything.

Interviewer: Have you ever faced any hostility in drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I've been fortunate enough not to face hostility in the sense of people being angry that I was doing drag or, um, people thinking that me doing drag is wrong. Um, other than on the Internet. I mean there's always going to be a troll who wants to pop in your comment section. And I just had to let that go. But as far as in person, I think the worst thing I've dealt with is just sexual harassment. Um, I hope that answered that question.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Diana Tunnel: Um, so before I started doing drag myself, uh, I was a super fan. I mean I would go to Nashville every time a drag race queen was in town to meet them. Um, I mean I was a huge fan and what was crazy is some of the first friends I made when I moved to Chicago were girls who had been on the show. So, it was kind of this weird, surreal moment of becoming friends with somebody that you are a fan of, which is kind of crazy. Uh, as far as the show itself, I think it put drag out there. Um, and depending on when you started drag, like I know some drag queens who have been doing it long before RuPaul's Drag Race aired kind of have a more negative opinion because it made it so mainstream and like there's a new queen every five minutes. Um, so I think it definitely over-saturated the market. Um, but you still, I mean you have people who are doing drag as a hobby or may not be doing drag in the next two months. Yeah. Um, and you have people who are really dedicated to it. Um, I dedicated and making it their career. So, I think even

with the popularity, um, and the hype, you quickly learn what did you have the stuff for it or not? Um, I'm grateful to the show. I think it has its flaws. Yeah. Um, but it does put this art form in the American living room and it, like I said earlier, it creates that conversation that maybe people wouldn't otherwise have. So, I think it's a really important thing still that, you know, we're on mainstream television and conservative families are having these conversations and young LGBT people are seeing representation on television. So, they know that like, you can live your life this way. You can live your life as a gay person out here doing full ass drag and society will for the most part, accept you.

Interviewer: Um, you touched on like a couple of RuPaul's controversial opinions. How do you feel about RuPaul?

Diana Tunnel: Um, like I said, think RuPaul has been a huge pioneer for us and then a voice, but, um, RuPaul does have some outdated ways of thinking about drag or about, um, identity. Uh, I think we have to remember RuPaul is well within his sixties. So, uh, things have changed. Our society has changed a lot in the last 20 years and it's a lot to adjust to. So, do I expect RuPaul to be a perfect enlightened person? No, none of us are. Um, but he has such an important and influential role in our society in the LGBT community that I hope and wish he would educate himself more and really take stock of the message he's putting out there. And what the repercussions of speaking on the exclusion of trans people, uh, what effect that has in our community. And the young people who are listening to that and thinking that may be trans people aren't as equal as cis people in the gay community. Um, so yeah, I just really would hope that RuPaul take stock of the message that's going out.

Interviewer: Have you seen season nine of RuPaul's Drag Race?

Diana Tunnel: I have seen season nine.

Interviewer: Okay, I ask that because we've watched all of season nine in class. And who's your favorite contestant on season nine?

Diana Tunnel: I'm a little bias. I love Shea Couleé.

Interviewer: Yeah, makes sense.

Diana Tunnel: I have a lot of mutual friends. I've never actually, I think I was in a conversation circle with Shea once and I was way too nervous to say hi, it was while season nine was airing. Um, but I know so many people who have been so deeply influenced by Shea's friendships. So, um, I love her. I think she's wonderful. Um, speaking after the show. I Love Trinity. I'm so glad she was one of the winners of all stars. I think she's a powerhouse performer. I don't know who I've met on that season. I've met Aja, um, and she can drink you under the table, but they're all really nice girls. I've met quite a few of them. Um, not a huge fan of Eureka but that's pretty much my only contingency on that season.

Interviewer: Why do you say you're not a huge fan of Eureka?

Diana Tunnel: Um, so I don't know if you personally have watched season ten of Drag Race.

Interviewer: I have not.

Diana Tunnel: Um, I'm going to give you some spoilers.

Interviewer: Go for it.

Diana Tunnel: Uh, so Eureka does come back for season 10. She had a leg injury and that's why she had to leave season nine. So, um, they do bring her back for season 10, um, a really good friend of mine, The Vixen, was also on season ten. They had some issues. They had some fights and Eureka has said a lot of really tone-deaf things about race. She comes from a very similar area, um, I was from, so, you know, I understand that, you know, there's no kind of being ignorant and sometimes you just really aren't educated about certain issues.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Diana Tunnel: But with that comes a responsibility of educating yourself and of taking stock of what you have done or said that was ignorant and taking ownership of that. And unfortunately, Eureka has not taken a lot of opportunities to own her ignorance and, uh, learn from it.

Interviewer: That's very interesting. Um, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Diana Tunnel: Um, I think, I just hope that it was more positive. Um, there is a lot of shade and oftentimes shade is fun. It's fun to throw shade at your friends and yeah, make little jokes. But I think, um, there's still so much negativity and, um, even just in giving unsolicited advice where, you know, people are trying to give a dig in a really passive aggressive way, um, whether it's, you know, going up to a new queen and just tearing her makeup down and uh, tell her everything she's doing wrong without building her up. I wish more queens were open to building each other up and I'm remembering that your words have effects on people. Um, and maybe it's not always the best thing to criticize before you really know who you're talking to.

Interviewer: Okay. What do you think, we may have touched on this, but what do you think are misconceptions that people have had about drag?

Diana Tunnel: Um, for one, the whole idea that has to be a sexual thing and it's not definitely not. Um, and that we're all just men in wigs. Uh, there are a variety of different performers. Um, doing a variety of different types performance. So, I think, hopefully people learn, especially with RuPaul's Drag Race being so mainstream and shows like Dragula and Camp Wannakiki, uh, that are coming up. I hope people learn that there's so many different types of drag, there's so many different ways you can do drag. Uh, and you know, it's not a perverse, weird thing. It's just something a lot of people like to do and uh, we just think it's fun.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, if you could choose one thing people should know about drag, what would it be?

Diana Tunnel: Um, it is uncomfortable. Uh, we may look gorgeous and put together, but that wig is glued on our head. Um, it is squeezing our heads. There's a thousand pounds of makeup on our

face and we are squeezed into tights of corsets that to the point that we can't breathe. So, while we may look gorgeous, we are not comfortable.

Interviewer: Very interesting. So that's all the questions I have.

Diana Tunnel: Awesome. I hope I gave you good information or at least something to use.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've definitely learned a lot and it definitely helped.

Diana Tunnel: Good. Thank you so much for asking me. I'm really flattered.

Interview with Dixie Que

To cite this please use the following:

Temko, Ezra. 2020. Student interview with Dixie Que. *Sociology of Drag*. April 29, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/dixie-q-said-jiddawy/>

Dixie Que: Can you hear me?

Interviewer: I can hear you. Yes.

Dixie Que: I can hear you, too.

Interviewer: How are you?

Dixie Que: I'm good, how are you

Interviewer: I'm good. I'm Liz

Dixie Que: Hi, I'm Said.

Interviewer: Nice to meet you. I'm going to record you is that okay?

Dixie Que: Yeah that's fine.

Interviewer: Okay. Umm. Alright. So, its ah nice to meet you and get to have this opportunity with you.

I really appreciate it. Umm, I gotta a couple of questions for you. And just however you want to answer them is good. Kind of like nothing is off limits. Whatever you want to say will be good. Alright, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Dixie Que: Umm so I probably first heard about drag. I don't know it would have been like when I was 16 or something like that. Umm I probably, think remember going out with like my family or something and they were like here's this dive bar. So, we went in and I saw it and I thought oh so that's cool and interesting. Umm I was really intrigued by like how people, just like, did what they wanted without societies expectations and repercussions. And it was really cool because it was an expression of art. I really, I guess really connected to that. Is that your puppy?

Interviewer: That's cool. I've been to a couple drag umm bars and I love the experience every time. I have a little girl and I had my mom babysit and I'm like, okay Mom, I'm gonna go to the drag bar and she's like "oh you'll have to tell me all about it."

Dixie Que: Yeah, it's so fun because like there's always like a vibe of love in the air you feel every time you go. And for me, that's what I saw and felt like.

Interviewer: I like that. When did you start performing as a drag artist?

Dixie Que: Well I started performing about three years ago.

Interviewer: And why? Why did you transition from just the observer to the participant?

Dixie Que: Umm it's kind of happened slowly but like, I don't know. I feel like the natural drag sideline is like I had it for Halloween or something and then it just kind of started. But for me it wasn't that. It was actually like an amateur night and I wanted to be like go and have fun, so I did. I like had so much fun that I just wanted to keep doing it.

Interviewer: That's cool. How do your friends, family and other people think about you being a drag artist?

Dixie Que: So, my chosen family is super supportive. My friends are super supportive and like my gay rights community is super supportive. I would say my biological family is not so much as supportive as other things. For them they don't quite understand it. So, people tend to fear what they don't understand.

Interviewer: That's, that's rough too.

Dixie Que: Mhmm.

Interviewer: Where did, what's your drag name.

Dixie Que: I'm Dixie Que.

Interviewer: And where did that come from?

Dixie Que: Okay so it's kind of a weird story, So Dixie ah just means bad in German. So that's where I got that from. And then I just needed a last name. So, I kind of went with Q because I figured it represents queer, queen, and questioning all these things.

Interviewer: Yeah, I like that. That's good. There are a lot of terms and styles of drag. So where does, what's your inspiration, what kind of drag do you do?

Dixie Que: I would say I do like punk drag. Cuz, I don't like to adhere to the goal per say. Umm my aesthetic currently is super pink. I like love pink things and anything gothy and vintage. Like I have huge pants and large platform boots that are like, leather. It's so much fun to wear.

Interviewer: Oh nice.

Dixie Que: Yeah. My inspiration comes from essentially like the things in the regular day to day life. So, like I love Stephen King novels, love horrors, stuff like that. I listen to a lot of like weird music like psychedelics and like that. That's where I would say like my inspiration comes from.

Interviewer: Cool.

Dixie Que: Yeah

Interviewer: The drag show that I went to was umm Island of Misfit Boys. It was like a punk like rock show.

Dixie Que: That's so cool. Yeah, I love that. I love that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: Oh yeah it was great. My dogs barking, I'm sorry.

Dixie Que: Aw. What's your dog's name?

Interviewer: She thinks she's a queen too, haha. Uh, so who influenced you in drag. Or like any?

Dixie Que: So, obviously like umm because of RuPaul's drag race and stuff like that. Those are big names that have influenced me because they are so popular and out there like. Local queens because I grew up in Toronto. So local queens have influenced me as well. Umm, yeah those are really like my only inspirations. So that's about me that I knew at the time. But I feel like that drag is more mainstream and we have the Internet to like connect us to like seek more and see more. I just every time I see something, I like I just like save it, the idea or whatever and I'll reinterpret it into my own version of it.

Interviewer: That's great.

Dixie Que: Mhmm.

Interviewer: We are watching umm RuPaul's drag race in our class right now that I'm taking.

Dixie Que: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: We watched all of Season 9 and so were getting ready to watch Sasha Velour you know win the whole thing.

Dixie Que: Oh my god, nice. It's so good. Yeah Sasha is a huge inspiration for me for sure. I love her like weird quirkiness. I love that. It's cool because like she does this thing that combines being pretty as well as the weirdness into like a perfect harmony.

Interviewer: I like that.

Dixie Que: Mhmm.

Interviewer: I like that she brings this creative, like artistic, thing that's a little bit different from what everyone else kind of you know.

Dixie Que: Mhmm.

Interviewer: Kind of more.

Dixie Que: You can tell she's intelligent too. You can tell there is thinking behind everything she does.

Interviewer: Yeah. I like that idea. Do you consider your drag political?

Dixie Que: Definitely. Oh yeah. Are you kidding? How somebody steps out of their house and anything other than, it's political. You are making a choice by doing that, right? You're making a statement, telling everyone around you that it's okay to be this way. To be whatever the heck and yeah, it's definitely political. You're creating a space too. A space for like other people to be like comfortable; to be themselves. Which is super powerful.

Interviewer: I agree. And the things they can do in those spaces are amazing.

Dixie Que: Exactly. Usually it's like, you're spreading the message of love. Which is like, come on. Haha.

Interviewer: Yeah

Dixie Que: That's the way to fight hate.

Interviewer: For sure. For sure. Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Are you a part of a drag family, collective, or something?

Dixie Que: Ah, yes. So, I umm currently live in Peterborough and last summer, in July, I started my own drag family. All because of a cousin. Um. It's crazy because we're all big personality types, but like, we're all like misfits and that's all we have than like other homes or regular homes. But it's good to have backing of a sisterhood of supportive families. To always fall back on. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's awesome. What is it called again? I didn't catch it, I'm sorry.

Dixie Que: House of Accountants.

Interviewer: Accountants?

Dixie Que: Yeah, haha.

Interviewer: Wow, I like that. That's cool. How often do you guys perform then?

Dixie Que: Ah. I would say like twice a month we have events. Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you perform in the same spot or different place?

Dixie Que: Different spots. And then if like we like. We like travel a lot. So, like, there is an event happening somewhere else and we are asked to perform or are out like that. In town, we have like have a specific bar that we are known to frequent.

Interviewer: Okay.

Dixie Que: Yeah.

Interviewer: And how many people do you have?

Dixie Que: Currently we are at four. There is four of us.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright. What goes into getting ready for performance?

Dixie Que: Umm. So much. So many things. So, for me because I'm always like the person behind the curtain, like calling all the shots. I have to book the venue, get the DJ, print out posters, design the poster. I also do the graphic designs. Make the Facebook event page, invite people and make sure people know about that event and that it's happening. On the day of, get ready, prepare songs, learn the routines, and then you perform. Make sure everyone is being safe, sober and alive. And then after the fact, pay everyone so that we can keep it going.

Interviewer: Oh. That's a lot. What goes into just your performance and you?

Dixie Que: Umm. For my own performance I love being like an aesthetic queen so I always spend at least two days before I am. Just making sure all my looks are perfected and then I will choreograph my numbers and run them through. Then be ready to perform them.

Interviewer: Wow. Two days huh?

Dixie Que: Yeah cause I have actual life things going on. Otherwise.

Interviewer: Haha. I know. I know. You like you have your job, and then you have life and things.

Dixie Que: Yes, exactly. You, it's like the layers of like, things happening.

Interviewer: What are the biggest challenges of drag and being a drag queen. Or drag artist, I mean.

Dixie Que: Umm. I feel, that okay, so I feel like the biggest challenge is always, be like you are underappreciated and undervalued. People don't realize how much work goes into it cuz they don't see the behind the scenes. They only see like the three minutes you're on stage. Right? And they applaud and that was amazing three minutes. But like, kay that was like two weeks' worth of preparation.

Interviewer: Yeah, haha. That's crazy. We've done a lot of you know restaurant kind of business in my life and you know you spend a couple of minutes or you know at night a couple of hours going to this event. There is so much planning that's involved in it. Its...

Dixie Que: Its wild. I feel like in all theater, any form of theater production there is so much happening back stage. And there is always hiccups happening that people don't see. But like people don't know that and they don't need to know that, haha.

Interviewer: Right. You're trying to hold it all together for them, aren't you?

Dixie Que: Exactly. The show must go on.

Interviewer: Hahahaha. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places that you've known about the drag culture there?

Dixie Que: Umm. The, I would guess that there wasn't one before me. Haha. There was one or like a few queens here, but they only did bingo nights. Not so much performance nights and then after I showed up and I like got this club started.

Interviewer: That's awesome.

Dixie Que: Yeah, exactly things are like actually happening.

Interviewer: Wow.

Dixie Que: Mhmm.

Interviewer: And where are you from?

Dixie Que: Well I'm from Toronto but I currently live in Peterborough.

Interviewer: That's like an amazing like feat to be able to organize that in your area.

Dixie Que: It needed something like. It was already so much art things happening here but like, I'm like "No drag? What the heck?"

Interviewer: Yeah. Cool. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Dixie Que: So out of drag, I am gender fluid. I use they/them pronouns and I would say I'm queer because I am attracted to all human beings no matter how they identify.

Interviewer: Alright. How has your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Dixie Que: I feel like it's the other way around. My drag has influenced who I am as a [inaudible] because I think before drag, I was more limited. Or I limited myself to who I was but then after drag I found this newfound freedom because I could accept myself in different ways.

Interviewer: Yeah

Dixie Que: And then in a way, it freed me from this idea that I had in my head of like the binary. And how one person is allowed to be and live their life. But now I know it's the other way around. My drag is how I see myself for sure.

Interviewer: That's awesome.

Dixie Que: It's like.

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Dixie Que: Sorry, I was just going to say it's just like I feel like before I was always putting myself in boxes. And then now I realize there is no box.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Dixie Que: You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah. I see that when we were watching the show and so I've done kind of some more research into that. And I think that it's amazing how it gives people and you know before I took this class I didn't really, you know how I went to shows but I really didn't know what that did for people. And then I learned that there was this whole other world to what drag was doing for people that I had knew nothing about. It's amazing how it is freeing and the other world of like drag kinging too. How these you know women are experiencing this other thing as well as. It's, it's just.

Dixie Que: And it goes even further with like people, like bioqueens, like women dressing up as drag queens.

Interviewer: Yeah

Dixie Que: Or like you know; it goes so much further, and for me it goes beyond gender and sex. It's art. You're just, like you have an idea and want to express it and you go wild. Go bananas, put on her mask and be crazy.

Interviewer: Haha. That's awesome. I love it. So how has the drag impacted or changed your life then?

Dixie Que: Umm, I have like zero living room now because like everywhere you look there is like a wig or dress or something, haha but.

Interviewer: Hehe.

Dixie Que: But, umm I love it. Like I would not give it up for anything. It is so much fun. And I like take all the negatives with all the positives. I know that I'm doing more good than I'm experiencing, so that's good for sure.

Interviewer: Do you have a lot of negative experience?

Dixie Que: Uh, no not a lot. But there's definitely that. They exist, for sure. I feel like, that's what I mean there's like 95% is good, there's a 5% bad.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Dixie Que: But there is such an overwhelming goodness that you like kinda overlook that.

Interviewer: That's great to be optimistic like that. Some people let that 5% drag them down, that's great you're not, you know.

Dixie Que: You've gotta like, remind yourself, that, that's all, like you could be having a bad day. I've had bad days in the past and I've got through those.

Interviewer: Right. I wish more people felt like that. Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Dixie Que: Ten million percent, haha. Um, definitely. For sure. I feel like it, like, Dixie Que carries on with me even though I'm out of drag. Definitely, she's still there somewhere underneath the surface.

Interviewer: That's awesome.

Dixie Que: Yeah.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time as a drag queen. What advice would you give to your younger self?

Dixie Que: Umm. Be fearless and don't be afraid to look like an idiot, haha. Cause like, just have fun. Don't be afraid to look like an idiot, yeah. That's good advice.

Interviewer: What is your show like that you do? Do you do lip syncing, do you do dance. Is it more like an artistic, kind of?

Dixie Que: So, in our house. Each of us has like something different. Umm, I specifically dance up and down queen. One of our house members, she's a comedy queen. So, her songs are inter-cut with funny skits or like horror movie quotes or something like that.

Interviewer: Yeah

Dixie Que: Each of us does something a little bit different.

Interviewer: Awesome.

Dixie Que: One of the performers, she's a hooper. So, she like has hoops and lights them on fire and stuff like that. Various circus acts. Yeah.

Interviewer: Wow.

Dixie Que: Mhmm.

Interviewer: Wow, that's kinda crazy. I'm curious, if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. How your drag has impacted your identity. Can you share about one or more of your social identities that like gender, race, class, or where you are located at that has like an association with the drag that you do?

Dixie Que: Um. So, in a way, I feel like. Okay I feel like this is specific because I live in a kind of a small town.

Interviewer: Mmkay.

Dixie Que: Umm. Cause you know everyone, and everyone knows you. Especially if you end up like performing and everyone comes to the shows. So, when I'm out of drag, it's still like I carry on this like notion that everyone knows me and like who I am or whatever. Um, where as I feel like that if you are in a bigger city, I don't know if that would be the same. My social identity that has changed essentially in that sense, would be like, just like the skillfulness of it all. And people like knowing, like, I don't know what I'm trying to say. Like, okay if I went out like right now like this, looking like this. I would still have the same response as if I went out in full drag.

Interviewer: Okay.

Dixie Que: Because I do drag.

Interviewer: And they know you.

Dixie Que: You know what I mean.

Interviewer: Yeah

Dixie Que: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: I live in a small town too. And I live in a town of like 7,000 people.

Dixie Que: Wow.

Interviewer: And that's with the prison that we have here too. They include them in the population. So.

Dixie Que: That's wild.

Interviewer: It's really smaller than that even. Um, but I'm only like an hour away from St. Louis, Missouri. So, I do all my interaction there and I wouldn't know those people on the street, you know. If I see a show but I wouldn't be able to recognize them.

Dixie Que: But that's out of drag, yeah.

Interviewer: But here if I were to dress up and perform. Um people would totally know me at Wal-Mart, hehe.

Dixie Que: Exactly, yes.

Interviewer: I totally understand that experience right here.

Dixie Que: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: How do you define drag?

Dixie Que: Um. For me everything is drag. Like it's putting on an outfit, putting on this like mask of how you want others to perceive you. Or how you want others to not perceive you. That's what drag is to me. Yeah.

Interviewer: All that. What do you think the purpose of drag is?

Dixie Que: Um, to explore the different like, avenues that you have inside of yourself. Yeah like I don't know. Today I'm feeling gothy so like I'll explore that avenue and like create something gothy. Today I'm feeling feminine. Put on something feminine and explore that avenue. Eventually you get to express yourself and the different versions that exist of yourself and the possibilities are endless.

Interviewer: I really like that. That's amazing. Do you think drag is sexual?

Dixie Que: It can be for sure. But I don't think inherently that it is, yeah.

Interviewer: Is it for you?

Dixie Que: Is it, sorry...sexual?

Interviewer: Is your drag, like do you incorporate a sexual thing into your dance.

Dixie Que: Yes and no. Yes and no. I think it depends on the kind of number I'm doing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Dixie Que: Uh, I just did, recently did a number that, umm. I did it to Marina and the Diamonds song, Savages. And I did like an angel look that transformed in a devil look.

Interviewer: Okay.

Dixie Que: And the whole number was just about how people underneath, you know like the whole philosophy theory altruistic love. It's just like I was arguing the opposite and that's all that number was about. It had nothing sexual to do with it either. But then as the number went on, I'm stripping on stage. That's purely just sexual. So, it's a yes and no answer.

Interviewer: So, do you like it in that response out of the crowd then?

Dixie Que: Well of course, haha. I'm a Leo so yes, haha.

Interviewer: So, you like RuPaul's drag race then? You mentioned that earlier and that's kind of like a large part of what we have been focusing on in our class. So, do you like appreciate him and the things it focuses on?

Dixie Que: I appreciate what the show is doing for the drag community. But I don't necessarily admire RuPaul, himself. He's problematic, because he's done some problematic things in the past. And that's like, pretty sure he's what like 67 or some shit like that, haha.

Interviewer: Haha, yeah. He's old.

Dixie Que: He's old as dirt. So, it only makes sense that his ideals would be a little ancient as well.

Interviewer: That's true.

Dixie Que: But um, but I really admire what the show has been doing because it's bringing drag queens into the mainstream and its giving all these all these different kinds of folks who expect the art on television. To show people that drag isn't one thing. It's just not one way of being.

Interviewer: It's got all these different things going on with it.

Dixie Que: Mhmm.

Interviewer: What do you think are some misconceptions that people have about drag?

Dixie Que: So, I feel like a huge misconception is that people always confuse drag and like people who are trans. Although they might overlap it's not one in the same thing. Yeah, I feel like that's a huge misconception.

Interviewer: Alright. I had actually never really known about um drag kinging or bioqueens whenever we came into it. Of course, everybody has heard about the baseline drag stuff, but I really thought it was interesting too. I even been to a couple drag queen shows and I had never seen a drag king and then I went to one a little while back and there that's all it was. And I thought oh how things have changed. You know, where we're incorporating, even now these kind of different things into it.

Dixie Que: I think that's the other thing you said. People, that's a huge misconception that like people always think that only gay men can only do drag or whatever. When in reality anyone can do drag and like you can be like whatever the fuck and do drag.

Interviewer: Uh yeah, I agree. If you could choose one thing for people to learn about drag, what would it be?

Dixie Que: Um, I would say go to a show, haha. And then you'll learn everything you need to know. Yeah, like learn that it's not about what people think it is. Haha, I feel like people always have, are thinking about that it's something else entirely. Just go to a show its fun, haha.

Interviewer: I like that. Now I mean, what can you learn from better than experience.

Dixie Que: Experience, yeah. It's about having fun and spreading love.

Interviewer: Well said. Anything else that you wanna add or that you think needs to be said out there.

Dixie Que: Uh, no nothing that I can think of.

Interviewer: No?

Dixie Que: No.

Interviewer: I really appreciate you talking to me today.

Dixie Que: Yeah, thank you for.

Interviewer: And all of the things you had to say. I'm going to...

Dixie Que: You're welcome. I'm sorry what was this for?

Interviewer: This, so this is for. I'm taking this class at SIUE.

Dixie Que: Okay.

Interviewer: We are putting together a whole bunch of interviews and we're going to like post kind of like an annotated thing online so that other people that are interested in drag...

Dixie Que: Wow.

Interviewer: Can use what you said about it and um, you know learn the things that you like put out there for the world. It's not going to be the video. I'm not going to post any videos, but I'm going to...

Dixie Que: You're going to transcribe it?

Interviewer: To transcribe what all we just talked about, so.

Dixie Que: That's so cool.

Interviewer: We're hoping to just put more information out there for other people and people that are interested or just wanna learn or whoever so there's other things out there. So, there's only 30 people in my class so we will have 30 you know just one source of 30 interviews so you can see what 30 different people who performed drag have to say about it.

Dixie Que: Okay.

Interviewer: I'm so glad you chose to be a part of it, I talked to several, I tried to reach several people and I couldn't get a hold of them and I really appreciate that you took your time to do this. I know it's really important what you do for your community.

Dixie Que: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Interviewer: And I'm gonna, do you have some videos posted of your, um like shows?

Dixie Que: Um, yeah, I can send you some.

Interviewer: Alright, that'd be great.

Dixie Que: Yeah.

Interviewer: Appreciate it.

Dixie Que: Okay, cool.

Interviewer: Alright, thank you very much.

Interview with Ginger KaiKai

To cite this interview please use the following:

Scoggan, Nikki. 2020. Interview with Ginger KaiKai. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 28, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/ginger-kaikai/>

Interviewer: When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah. So, I first heard about drag, funnily enough, when I was about 8 years old. Umm. It was 2002 and I was watching the show *The Weakest Link*, and RuPaul was on it as a contestant. And I asked my mom who RuPaul was. And my mom said RuPaul is a drag queen and I didn't know what that meant but I just knew that she was different and looked glamorous, and amazing and I looked up to my mom at 8 years old and told her I wanted to be a drag queen when I grow up, I didn't know what that meant or what that was. Um and she was just like "Oh, Oh, okay" and she just let that be. Then when I got to college, um, and I think that was what? 2011. There was a drag show on campus, and I went to go see, and I fell in love with it there and tried it out that following semester at the student show. And I've been doing it ever since.

Interviewer: Aww that is awesome.

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah

Interviewer: Alright, so your family and friends all took it really good when you told them?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah. Yeah, they are for the most part. Yeah, I don't think anyone in the family has had an issue with it. Um we don't all talk about it very much, anyways, but I don't think they have a problem with it. Um, all my friends, a good chunk of them, also do drag. Or I've met since then at shows or through college who are at least interested in it. So yeah, everyone is really supportive or helpful; It, kind of takes a community to produce a drag queen anyways. We can't do it all on our own. Um so yeah everyone is pretty supportive for the most part.

Interviewer: That's good. And then, what is your style of drag that you do?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah, so that's evolved over time. When I first started doing drag, it was, it was awful. It was just a cheap blue wig that I found at a Halloween store with some lip gloss and my friends clothes. Then over time from watching RuPaul's *Drag Race*, from seeing different drag queens here where I'm from in Rochester, New York, I've picked up some of their style because we have a bunch of different styles here. We have more campy drag, some people that do really wild, dramatic makeup, some that look kind of more like clowns than they do drag queens. Then we also have people that are very fishy and feminine, some people that are more spooky and scary, and I've tried out all of those styles just in practicing makeup, and I've kind of landed on a style that is more dramatic but somehow soft. It's a polished form of, I guess, semi-dramatic makeup. Um, I mean you've seen my Instagram. It varies sometimes. Or I'll do just more simplistic

makeup for a drag queen, that is. And then other times I've definitely pushed it and gone darker and more dramatic. When I was doing drag probably for a year or two, I definitely went for more of a vampy, goth, dominatrix look for a while, and loved that. And then over time I've done some more high fashion looking stuff. And now I've just kinda settled into this style or I like things that are flowy and move and the drama is kind of in the clothing. So, it evolves, and that kind of is where it is right now.

Interviewer: Okay, and then who or what has influenced your drag?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah, um, oh god. There have been many influences. (chuckles). Funny enough my uh, when I first started doing drag and practicing the makeup my grandmothers doctor told me I looked like my now ex stepmother and that was the funniest thing. So, women in my life have played a role in it for sure. But then when I started doing drag it was some of my closest friends who were the most supportive and encouraging me to get on stage because I was horrified of getting on a stage. And then it's been really looking at drag queens from where I am from that have been supportive over that years that have said "Yeah that was really great" or "Yeah I really like when you do this look" or "I really like when you do this number" or "I don't like when you do this number" or "That wig looks terrible, this one looks great". And so those influences have been more from friends, sisters, community members, sisters meaning drag sisters. That's been a major, major influence. And I mean famous people of course too, I mean when I was younger Lady Gaga was the big inspiration for me. But I think I have always been more inspired by looking at the confidence of the performers around me, and taking inspiration from them, more so than I do the people on RuPaul's Drag Race right now. When I started out in drag, RuPaul's drag race was a huge inspiration. When it was more queens that were more polished and doing drag for a long time. It was still pretty underground., But now today when I watch the show there are some cool looks, and every once in a while, I'll think someone is great. But I'm like "Okay, I've seen that before" and I can be inspired by more local people and gain something from them.

Nikki. Yeah! Do you consider your drag political in anyway?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah! I think that drag is inherently political. It is looking at what generally considered socially acceptable and essentially saying "Fuck you" to it. Not every drag queen will take it that way. I know that I've always tried to, at least for a while, I would take a political stance on my Facebook or especially local issues, I would take stances on them on Facebook. I don't do that as much now. It is too divisive and hard to keep up with having other things to do in my life. So, there is the literal political aspect there. I think that going out in drag and being yourself and getting on a stage and doing something that so many people don't see as okay. It's an, inherently a political act. And its empowering. So, I think that most people that do drag, without knowing it, there is a political aspect there. But I do try to get involved in the literal political side, if it seems the right moment.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awesome. And then, how often do you perform and where do you perform at?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah! So that's changed throughout time. So, when I first started performing it was barely at all. and then after I was doing it for a couple of years, it was just about every week at a local club here. And that club closed, and now it's a bunch of us don't have a place to perform, so

a lot of us have been coming together to do shows at a bunch of different places. That's one thing where it's good that RuPaul's drag Race has been helpful, so that more people know what it is so they are more open with having drag shows at their venues. And so now it's at least once a month. Sometimes it's three times in one week. But then I'll go two weeks without doing a show at all. So, it's quite variable. But it varies from gay venues to straight venues, bar, clubs, colleges. Wherever there is a paycheck, I'll be there. (Laughs)

Interviewer: (Laughs). What goes into getting ready for a performance?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah, so I start by showering and shaving. So, there's that, but even before that there is thinking about what you are wanting to do, what you are wanting to perform. I mean sometimes I don't know, and I'll figure that out while I'm getting ready. But there's definitely that aspect thinking about what you want to do. And then it's sitting down and doing the makeup first. I don't have eyebrows during the day. So that saves a step in doing the makeup. But, as my other friends that do drag will tell you, I still take longer than they do. And they have eyebrows. So, for me, when I am doing my makeup, I am very meticulous about it. I want to make sure that it looks a very specific way. So, it's like sitting down to paint or draw. So, there's that. It's making sure that I am caffeinated enough and hydrated enough to go do it. And that I've eaten. And then throughout getting ready, it depends on if I have people with me or not. I'll get very distracted. Then I'll start packing my suitcase, getting my wigs ready, getting my clothes ready, picking my songs, usually I'm posting on Facebook about it, and trying to get people to come to the show. Sometimes if I'm helping plan the show it is responding to messages. If I'm going to be helping out with hosting the show, it's freaking out about that, and trying to prepare some things to say. It really depends, but there is always the ritual of doing the makeup, packing the bag, getting the clothes ready. Those things are always there. And that's the thing I like about it most, it's very... There are steps to it. But there is always points in the steps to kind of get creative and have fun.

Interviewer: Yeah! What do you think is the biggest challenge with getting ready?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah, one of the biggest challenges, well if I screw my makeup up then everything's a disaster and I freak out for a good ten minutes. Especially when I was starting drag. One time I messed my face up two times in a row, wiped it all off, and had twenty minutes to get ready. So that was a disaster, but that was years ago. Now I know kind of how to fix my makeup when I mess it up without wiping everything off. But getting the body on, the numerous pairs of tights, the fake hips, the corset, the attaching a wig to your head. All of those things are exhausting. More exhausting than doing the makeup. But some of the other things that are difficult... Like if you're having a bad day, it's going to be hard to get into drag. I mean sometimes it helps, other times it doesn't. So, um it's impossible to not have your day to day life fall into it. So, if you're feeling self-conscious that day, drag can either make that a lot worse. Or it could make it a lot better. But sometimes that can get in there and start to, you know, make it worse or better. It's kind of a crap shoot, you never know. Most of the time it does help, it does make it better. but not always. So that can be the hardest part.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah! So, Rochester New York has a long standing drag history. For a lot of different reasons. We have numerous people that have been in RuPaul's Drag Race from season 2, with Pandora Boxx, to I don't what seasons. But we've had Darienne Lake on there, we've had Mrs. Kasha Davis on there, so we have a pretty well-known name just from being on a national standing. But we've also had the longest standing, longest continuously standing drag pageant in the country. The Miss Gay Rochester Pageant. So, I think it's been almost forty years, thirty years that that been going? So that's been a very long running pageant. People have come from Ohio and other states to compete in the pageant. So that is interesting. But even with that there is so many different styles of drag. So, you aren't going to find just pageantry drag. You'll find people that are doing, you know, very campy clown drag, you'll find people that are doing burlesque drag, you'll find people doing spooky drag, more modern drag, classic drag. It's such an eclectic scene. You can really see anything here. What's interesting also now, is that we are going through kind of a little bit of a shaking. Because as I've mentioned, one of our local night clubs disappeared just about a year ago. And that was awful for a lot of us. It really fucked things up, and so a good chunk of us have been through one of our older queens here, her name is DeeDee Dubois, she created something called DeeDee's Club Night Out. To really serve as a way to get people to come together. So we find different venues, and different places to do different events. So that's kind of changing too. We've been able to kind of reignite the sense of community that was getting kind of lost, I think there for a little bit. And so it's, we are going through a lot of change right now. And that's unique, but we have such a history here that I think keeps it grounded. Like we will never loose drag here. Other cities have lost drag over the years with clubs dying or people leaving. But it's such a rich history here, and such a unique variety of styles that you'll never see it leave. And that's I think what you see here.

Interviewer: Well that's good.

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah!

Interviewer: Alright, and if you don't mind me asking. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Ginger KaiKai: Mhmm? Yeah! So, I, oh that's complicated because that's changed over time too. Umm I identify as queer all around. I see identity as more of a journey that changes over time, I don't think it's ever really fully stable. I was born male and mostly identify as that. I primarily have sex with men. But it is still nothing is set in stone. Nothing is solid about that for me. It's something that I am still exploring and will always explore with, with I guess with pride and no shame or fear in that. Some people require a stable identity, but I think that something I've strived towards not 100 percent having at least in that regard.

Interviewer: Okay! And then, has your sex and gender identity influenced your drag?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah! That's a good question. I think it's influenced my drag and drag has influenced it back. Drag has made me more comfortable with fluidity. Because when you're getting called not your name all the time, you get called Ginger, and you have other pronouns used, you get comfortable with them. At least I do, not everyone has. Umm and that's kind of allowed me to experience and explore how I feel about that. And it's not something that's ever bothered me.

And it bothers some people. Umm, being open to it as well, different expressions of gender, it's also allowed my drag to be more fluid as well. You'll find people that are like "you need to have big breasts, you need to have fake hips, you need it look like an exaggerated woman, you need this, you need this, you need this". But I kind of approached drag differently. I want to look at myself in the mirror and see what I want. And I want to look at someone else and say "Okay, you look like you're fitting what you want. You look confident. You look comfortable." Other people want to project and say "no, you need to look this way to be a drag queen." And I think that having a more fluid understanding of gender allows you to look at drag in that same fluid way.

Interviewer: Okay! How has drag impacted or changed you?

Ginger KaiKai: Mhmm. Um well for a while it provided me with confidence. Well it still does to an extent. It provides me with friends in a sense of community. Not always, but it does. Especially when we had our nightclub here. that was a big beacon. It was a place that I would go once a week, at least, and see all these people that I knew. So, a lot of queens feel connected to people. And I only learned that more recently when it disappeared, and you don't see these people really as much. So, it definitely did that. It gave me an outlet for creativity. It gave me a way to approach people and meet people without being as scared. And it just taught me to kind of think of myself differently, and to love my self differently, and to take ownership over what I am and what I can do. In a way that I don't know that I would have been afforded with just not doing it.

Interviewer: Yeah! Okay. If you could go back in time, what advice would you have given your younger self?

Ginger KaiKai: Oh Gosh. Umm (chuckles). That's a good question. Umm. take everything a little less seriously. You know it's, nothing, well a lot of things are serious. But nothing that you are doing is that serious. You know this isn't brain surgery. This isn't a war. This isn't, you know, anything like that. it's meant to be fun, it's meant to be inclusive, it's meant to be loving. So just know that. And people will like you for you, and to continue doing that. At least in regard to drag, that is kind of the advice I would give. Spend a little less money too. Probably that. (chuckles)

Interviewer: Alright! And then, how would you define drag?

Ginger KaiKai: yeah, that's a relatively complicated question. Which that's kind of a stupid answer. Drag is umm, both a mask and a mirror, I guess. Because you can... I think no matter what when you get into drag you're going to change a little bit. Everyone does. You know, no one knows why. I mean I'm sure people do. But like if you start painting, there is somewhere in the process of putting on your makeup, putting on your hips, and your wigs. For all of that something kind of changes. Or if you're a drag king, somewhere in your process in putting on your makeup, something changes. Or say you're some other types of drag, because there are so many kinds of drag, something changes. So, it's a little bit of a mask. But it's a mirror because you learn so much about yourself through it. So, I guess an art form really is what it is. It's an art form that is difficult to define. I mean it's not painting, it's not sculpture, it's drag, and I think it's meant to be messy and complicated, talked about, and discussed, and attempted to be defined. But I don't think you'll ever find a definition that didn't encapsulate it entirely, because the classic definition

"Oh that's a man dressing as a woman and a woman dressing up as a man." I mean that doesn't fit today.

Interviewer: Yeah!

Ginger KaiKai: I mean you, yet you have trans women that are doing drag. And to say that they're not doing drag, but if they say what they are doing is drag, then no that's wrong. They are doing drag if they think they are doing drag. I mean sometimes I will look at someone doing drag and I'll be like "Okay, you're not doing drag yet, it's still a little messy." But if they are polished, and confident, and doing something that they love and care about, then they are a drag queen or a drag king. I mean I've heard some people try to say "Oh there are not trans women that do drag. They aren't drag queens, they are show girls." And I'm like, "Well if they think they are then yeah, but if they think they are a drag queen, then they are a drag queen." So, it's far more complicated than a lot of people like to give that classic definition to. And I think that's something kind of excited about drag. It's an art form that's messy. It's an art form that has community value, it's an art form that informs the community and changes the community in a way that, I don't know if I can say in main stream America, you see in art form like that. I mean, it's different. (laughs)

Interviewer: (laughs) Now do you think that drag can be sexual in any way?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah! I think that it can be sexual. Kind of the same way burlesque can be sexual. As an art form I think that... I mean some people have sex in drag, I don't. That's too expensive stuff that I'm not going to get ruined. But yeah, I think that it can be sexual. but with all things sexual, it's got to be consensual and you know, I've done some very sensual and sexual performances before. And I think that it can and should be sexual if people want it to be. I mean I've seen people do burlesque drag where they are stripping down in that very sensual, not necessarily sexual way. Yeah, I think it can be and if people want it to be it should be.

Interviewer: Okay. And then if you could change one thing about drag, or the drag community what would it be?

Ginger KaiKai: Just for people to not be so, I guess, critical of each other, or one-minded about everything, or rigid. Like just because you have a different style doesn't mean other styles aren't good. I mean, I've fallen victim to saying things before that, in retrospect, I'm like "God, no that doesn't matter. Their drag is just as valid as my drag." And so, I think that's the most crucial thing, in fact I can say that for the whole world. Everyone just needs to be a little bit nicer to each other. And I think that the drag community is just like that. If we were all more encouraging and supportive of each other I think that we would see a lot more beautiful drag. but as it gets more mainstream, people get more competitive. And as people get more competitive people can get more mean. And so, I see how it's happening, and there is nothing wrong with a little shade and a little reading here and there, I mean that's part of the game. But just general meanness or hate towards each other or discrediting a whole style of drag out of thinking yours is the rights one, and the best one. There is no need for that. That's pointless.

Interviewer: Yeah. What do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag?

Ginger KaiKai: Mhmm. I think a lot of one of the biggest misconceptions is that drag queens are just a bunch of gay men dressing up like women. It's not just drag queens, there are drag kings. People forget about them. People delegitimize it as a style in artist form. People think it's less difficult because they don't wear heels. And I'm like "Well if they are not trans and they have their breasts, that's far more painful to hide than tucking a penis." So, I've watched it happen, it's legitimate. I think that that's a misconception. I think, I mean there's a classic misconception that every drag queen wants to be a women, but I think that that ones being dispelled. And I think that it's opening up people's eyes to gender more, because of that. Other misconceptions... I think one is that just a lot of people have a misconception of trans women wanting to trick men into have sex with them. A lot of people have that same misconception with drag queens. Some do. Some people do like to that. It's not the smartest idea, because it's not safe. But they do. But that's a misconception. There are many misconceptions, and I can't think of all of them right now. But I think that a good thing about it is that more people are feeling more comfortable asking questions. So that's good.

Interviewer: Yeah! And then if you could choose one thing that you would like people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Ginger KaiKai: Well, it's more difficult than it looks. But if you want to do it, everyone should give it a try at least once. It's so liberating to do it. If you want to and you have the desire to try it, go for it. It's difficult and it's addicting. So, I always give it that caution. I always tell people go for it, but if you truly are meant to be a drag queen, you are not going to be able to stop. Because it's going to do something to you that you aren't going to be able to walk away from easily. But it's difficult, but worth it. I guess that's one thing I want people to know. I wouldn't do this if it wasn't worth it.

Interviewer: Yeah! Then can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Ginger KaiKai: Yeah! So, my day job, I work at the local community college as an institutional researcher. So, I work with helping with reports and data and researching different things about the institution, graduation rates, and what not. I have a Master's degree in Human Development specializing in research. a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and American Sign Language from the University of Rochester, for both of them. I live in Rochester. I moved here when I went to college, which is 2011. Prior to that I lived in Palmyra, New York P-A-L-M-Y-R-A, not Elmyra. Which is where Mormonism was founded, interestingly enough. And I lived there up until I went to college. And now I'm 25, nearly 26 and working and doing drag, and having an itch to go back to school and change everything. because that's what I like to do. So yeah, that's me in a nutshell. I'm neurotic, but you know who isn't these days.

Interviewer: Alright well that's all the questions I have for you.

Ginger KaiKai: Fantastic

Interviewer: Thank you so much for letting me interview you, I really appreciate it.

Ginger KaiKai: Of course!

Interviewer: It was really nice to learn things from you and to get your perspective.

Ginger KaiKai: Awesome, I am so glad I could help.

Interviewer: Thank you. Well I hope you have good evening.

Ginger KaiKai: You too. Bye

Interviewer: Bye.

Interview with Heaven Leigh

To cite this interview please use the following:

Temko, Ezra. 2020. Student interview with Heaven Leigh. *Sociology of Drag*, SIUE, April 30, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/uncategorized/heaven-leigh/>

Interviewer: Okay, you ready? All right. Let's do this. Yep. When did you first hear about drag and what were your initial reactions to it?

Heaven Leigh: So I first heard about drag probably as a kid when, like, watching *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, but like I don't think I learned about it really until like later years of like high school when I stopped using like the word like tranny and transvestite, because that was like what was used in uh, ye old days. Obviously, I started getting into politics and stuff in high school.

Interviewer: But when did you start performing as a drag artist? And why did you start performing?

Heaven Leigh: About a year ago? I wanted to explore a different side of myself and the way that I express myself.

Interviewer: How did your family friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Heaven Leigh: Friends and family that were like close to me, they were excited and supportive, other family members, not so much, but the ones that I keep close to here positive.

Interviewer: Where does your drag name come from Heaven Leigh?

Heaven Leigh: So, my mom went through multiple different stages of naming she had started originally with Danielle Jennifer. So, it would have been like Danny or like DJ for, for like shortened versions of the name. My grandma hated that because she already had a granddaughter of Andrea and the shortening Andy my grandma didn't like the idea of having two granddaughters with boy names and the second one that my mom went through was Heaven Leigh from a book series that she read growing up and she was like the main character and it kind of plays off of like the masculine like "Lee" but also like, I have a, I have a lot of like, past with like religion and stuff. So, it's kind of fun to play off of. If I'm going to play off myself. Might as well go all the way.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, from drag queen, drag king to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, beauty queen, queer artist, bioqueen, and camp queen among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag. And what kind of drag do you do? What's like your main style?

Heaven Leigh : If I was going to use any labels, probably queer artist or drag king, if I was going all out it would be very showy. I mean labels. I think that they just like they help you be able to like,

discuss what you're trying to do and they kind of give you a like, a means of communication, but I also don't think that I really have any attachment to any label

Interviewer: And so, does the type of drag you do affect your life as a drag artist? If not, that's okay, if so how?

Heaven Leigh: I would think so because you do like different forms of makeup, and the style of clothing is different. Obviously, if you're, if you see like a regular like what comes to mind when you think of a drag queen, you would see like the big like star makeup with, you know, big eyelashes and all that stuff. But I think you have to learn differently to do like, drag king, like, give yourself more masculine or hyper-masculinized features as opposed to hyper-feminized.

Interviewer: Right, okay. Do you consider your drag to be political why or why not?

Heaven Leigh: I would think so if, if I was going to say so I wouldn't apply that for everybody, but I think that since the LGBT+ community is still persecuted to this day. I think it's important to make statements using art, and even in like my other art forms. I like at least having like that political like underlying like freedom to express myself.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Sweet. How do you identify in terms of your sex gender identity and gender expression out of drag?

Heaven Leigh: Out of drag, female would be the sex. Gender identity I go as, I would say that I am a woman, but like gender expressions, like I don't really like care a whole lot. Sometimes I kind of like sway on the gender dimension. I would say some days I'm more masculine some days I'm more feminine. In the lesbian community we have terms for, for the ways that we express. Being futch would be very masculine, being very femme, being a very feminine lesbian. But, being like right in the middle is like butch and so like I kind of fall between futch and femme most days.

Interviewer: Okay, do you think drag has influenced your idea of gender?

Heaven Leigh: I think so. I think it's allowed me to loosen the restrictions of like how I view people instead of having that stereotype in your head and holding back. The first thing that comes to mind always that, uh, "Is that a guy or is that a girl?" Like it's just really doesn't matter. You can always just refer to someone as 'they' until you know.

Interviewer: How has dragged impacted or changed you? Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag. If so how if you could go back in time as Heaven Leigh. What advice would you give her, in your younger self?

Heaven Leigh: Let's take that step by step. So, like the first, first question.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So how has drag impacted and changed you?

Heaven Leigh: How has drag impacted me, I think it's made me more confident and in the way that I express myself with my clothes and shit, and I think that it's opened up a lot of doors to like a new group of people and being able to, like, meet people like in the scene and hear their stories and hear and see how they, you know, they use drag to express themselves and kind of more of a

positive, uplifting community that you just kind of carried on with you even when you leave the drag show.

Interviewer: Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're not in drag?

Heaven Leigh: Somewhat I, I think it's more of a like a fake it 'till you make it type deal. I mean, obviously everybody has like bad days and good days for confidence. In general, I would say I'm in a much better place than I was even like a few years ago, although obviously there are daily struggles.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time as Heaven Leigh, what advice would Heaven Leigh give your younger self?

Heaven Leigh: You choose who gets to be in your inner circle and you don't have to listen or care about other people's opinions if you don't want to and it's all temporary anyway. You're going to find other people who are going to bring you up and are going to be there for you. Also, please, for the love of God, no more bangs.

Interviewer: Oh man, that's good. I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. How drag has impacted your identities? Can you share about one or more of your social identities such as gender, race, class, age, or geography. Wow geography, that's good. That's going to be in my podcast

Heaven Leigh: Amazing

Interviewer: religion, size, sexuality, and disability, etc. and or the interaction of these special identities have impacted your experience of drag and or how drag has impacted your experience. I'm social identity. That is a lot.

Heaven Leigh: How has it impacted my experience of drag? My social identities, okay. For me, I guess I just I don't, I don't care so much. I, I, really feel like the like I'm closer to being androgynous than I was before, I think that I love realized a lot more things. Like I kind of realized like certain things about my body were like more so along the lines of body dysmorphia rather than "oh, I don't like I just don't like this". Like boobs. I, like, hate my boobs. Like I've always just hated that like I am like and it took me a long time but realizing like I'm talking to other people, especially those who do play with like gender and stuff. Like I want to get like a binder and stuff and possibly like help me, you know, be more of myself to be more comfortable in my own skin. I mean, I think it's easy for me. It's more easy for me than it is for like many others in the drag community. I think obviously minorities have it harder and trans people have it much harder because there's this kind of like, even though drag is becoming more accepted as an idea. Yeah. It's kind of hard to think about like what falls into that category and what doesn't instead of just like opening them up to everybody. So, I still think that they're still race issues. I think there's definitely still like, it's sort of a gay man's world kind of still, and for like drag queens of being the most popular thing. So, I think that there's definitely still a lot of a lot of issues. Yeah. Yeah still a good experience.

Interviewer: How do you define drag?

Heaven Leigh: I think drag is a play of expression. I think it's an art form that anybody can do and it's kind of like a sharing experience of art. And in the way that masculinity and femininity and gender roles are.

Interviewer: What do you think the purpose of drag is?

Heaven Leigh: I think the purpose is to free oneself a little bit. It's, it can be many things for many different people. It could be their way to get like a performance out just have fun or you know, connect with other people who they wouldn't normally connect with and kind of create a community where people can feel safe and have fun. At the same time enjoy political statements, I guess but like without having to take it so seriously.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual why or why not?

Heaven Leigh: I think drag can be sexual. Obviously, it's up to the drag artist on whether or not they want to display themselves in it in a sexual way, but I don't find bodies in and of themselves to just like be sexual as if that's like, their purpose. I think it's more about like being comfortable with your body and like being able to just like, especially like when other drag artist like strip and like, everybody is hootin' and hollerin'. I think it's like it's more of like just cheering somebody on for like exposing themselves and not and not having to cover up so much and feel ashamed of their bodies.

Interviewer: That was a really good point. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Heaven Leigh: Yeah. Now that I've started watching it. I think it's a fun way to normalize drag and I think that since drag, RuPaul's Drag Race, has become popular. I think you find a lot more people like talking about it and it spread all across social media and it brought out more issues in the LGBT community. And I'm sorry, I think it's like I think it shed a lot of light on it. But I also think as I got popular people are always just like drawn more to like the extreme dramatics of reality TV. It's heavily like fake and for show and all that but it's also a way to get people talking and interested.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about the drag about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be?

Heaven Leigh: Definitely the bias against bioqueens and trans people in the community. Again, I think that there's a lot of, even in the LGBT community, like it's very difficult for anybody who's not a white gay man to express themselves or be different because a lot of people only get to see the white gay men or see lesbians has like sexually objectified highly like porn and stuff. Like that's really all that you see. You don't get to see her a lot of other people just living their lives without having to be sexual object. So, I think that if I could change it, I would get rid of like all the stigmas and all the rules, except no straights. It's very frustrating, the straights right now, but obviously you're still inviting to still, come hang out with you. Got it. You can't be like disrespectful. I just think that there's so much like disrespect and hate in the community still. Yeah that it just needs to chill out.

Interviewer: Do you think that people have misconceptions about drag like where it comes from or what do you think would help change that?

Heaven Leigh: Sure, I think there's lots of misconceptions. I think since that since RuPaul's has become this big thing and just you only really get to see those queens a lot, it's, a lot of times it really is thought of only being a gay man dressing up as a woman, you know. So it's and it's not so much of an art form, I guess people just don't really see that, people think it's like a joke really and still like to kind of... That's like that's a what's that fucking term that I've heard lately, trap? Where they'll, it'll be like a man who dresses up like a woman and what does the makeup and whatever and then like, I don't like, he's like just chilling being himself doing his own thing. People call him The Trap, it's like, oh, yeah, he has a penis between his legs. So obviously that's not a hot lady and I can't believe you made me call her hot, you know, so it's like yeah.

Interviewer: I know you're talking about now.

Heaven Leigh: God what's his name? The kid that does makeup.

Interviewer: James Charles?

Heaven Leigh: Yeah, James Charles so, like people call him a trap because sometimes it can like look very like feminine. So it's like it's very frustrating because that's very horrendous for like in that really puts us back for like trans rights is you know, like trans people shouldn't even have to like, pass as their gender for you to see them as their gender. So it's, it just it feels very binary sometimes. Yeah.

Interviewer: If you could choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Heaven Leigh: I think people should do like this more often where you just you open up your eyes to a lot of people who are actually like involved in it like not such like big name artists like you can see on RuPaul's and just not take that as face value. Like oh, yeah, that's drag and really like explore the scene a little bit and kind of open up your boundaries to like, I could go and go to a drag club, drag club party or whatever just kind of experience it for self and not and not like take it so much as like this is my experience this because one experience enhances all drag like that's...

Interviewer: you think people need to look at the whole picture. Not just what they've seen on TV.

Heaven Leigh: Yeah. It's so much, there's, like I say about like everything, there's so much like more gray area than like what you would see if you... really just kind of have to accept that you don't know everything and what you've heard could be wrong and that you need to work on yourself while you're trying to learn about other things and other cultures because I think drag really is like its own culture really that, that's not just based on where you're from or what you look like, but it's, its, something entirely different and almost undefinable because the LGBT community is really only just starting to take ahold in society become popular.

Interviewer: Great. Well, thank you for answering all these questions. You did great. I loved hearing your insight.

Interview with Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland

To cite this interview please use the following:

Baker, Rhian. 2020. Interview with Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*. April 22, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/janessa-markstone-mornett-highland/>

Interviewer: When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Um, so I was in Springfield, Missouri, that's where I came out and went to college there. Um, and I went to Latin Vibe, which was the only eighteen and up bar there, I didn't really know there was a drag show going on, I was there with this guy I was on a date with, and we walked in and there was a drag queen on stage and her name was Victoria VonDutch, and she looked just like one of my high school girlfriends. So, at first I was kind of confused, as to who she was, cause I might've pregamed a little bit before going out. I thought it was kind of cool, I didn't really get it, and I was really new to the whole gay scene anyway, so I didn't give it much attention. And then, actually as I spent more time going out to the gay bars, I actually didn't like drag, at all. I wanted to like dance and party and I didn't understand pageants and I specifically remember one night I was there, at Martha's, which is the other gay bar in Springfield, and there were having the Miss Missouri US of A at Large Pageant. I remember sitting on the patio, like being a bratty like twenty-year-old, and I was mad, like why are they taking all of my dance time? And all of that, and it wasn't until I backup danced for one of the drag queens at a pageant that I started to like kind of get it and fall in love with it.

Interviewer: Awesome, so with that being said, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing/appreciating it?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, so I've always been a theater kid, and so I went to college and I was a theater education major, um, I actually started as a stripper, which was kind of a unique start. There were like 3-4 of us in St. Louis that actually started in Springfield as strippers, so I started that and was costuming and I in mixes, and it was very more like performance art where you took your clothes off, kind of, but really it was still stripping. Looking back it really wasn't all that great, but I did that. Then Akasha Royale, who actually lives in St. Louis now, we became very good friends. But she called me, and they were doing their first male pageant in Springfield, it was Mr. Latin Vibe, and there was somebody running she didn't want to win, so she was trying to find someone else who was talented enough to maybe beat them? So, she called me, and you know, told me she didn't want this person to win and asked me if I would do it. I was like, "I don't even know what a pageant is, but what do I need to do?" and she was like, "You're just gonna do everything I tell you to do." and so she put everything together for me, and choreographed my talent number, and all of that stuff, and I actually ended up winning. And that was kind of the first dive into pageantry. And as Mr. Latin

Vibe, I was asked to do a turnabout show where like all the popular, or like well-known gay boys were put in drag by the drag queens and we raised money for the AIDS Project in the Ozarks. So that was the first time I was ever in drag, and it just kind of took off from there.

Interviewer: So, how did your family, friends, loved ones, how did they kind of receive you becoming a queen?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, so everyone in my family knows, except for my dad, my dad still doesn't know. He wasn't super comfortable with me being gay. So, I don't know how he would handle the drag thing. But, initially, my mom found out on Facebook because I have two separate Facebook accounts, and I guess Janessa came up on her People You Might Know, and she started scrolling through pictures and thought "This looks oddly like my son with makeup on." Cause when I first started, it looked a lot like me, but with makeup on. So, she was okay with it, she didn't really get it at first. Like she asked if I wanted to be a woman, and all of that. The way I explained it was it's like acting, but instead of playing a character, like I would in a play, I played a character that I write the script for. And when I explained it that way, she kind of got it and as the rest of my family found out, they kind of got it, and then it really kind of got appreciation this past year when I ran for Miss America and I placed in the top five, and I showed my step-mom and my sisters videos and they were like, "This is like really a big deal." And saw how much effort and talent went into it. It wasn't just like going to the mall and buying a dress and putting some chapstick on and walking around the bar. You know? They really started to understand the art behind it. And the things that go into it.

Interviewer: Awesome. So, where does your drag name come from?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, so when I was a stripper, my name was Jace Silent, and Highland was the street I grew up on, so Highland Lake Dr. where I grew up. So totally cliché, and the person who like made all of my costumes and stuff helped me pick Jace, we thought it was like kind of a hot name or whatever, so when I started doing drag, for some reason I thought it was important that my initials were the same. Cause I was like doing drag as Janessa but also doing performances as Jace. And so, it was like, Jace and Janessa Highland, it was kind of cute it's like where it came from. And there's not like a bunch of J names to pick from as a girl. I didn't like Justice, there was already a Justice in Springfield. I didn't like Jamie, or Jessica. I was almost Jessica, and then Janessa. That's what it was.

Interviewer: I've actually never met anyone named Janessa.

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, I never really either. I was like scrolling through unique J names and it came up with that one and I was like I think that that's it.

Interviewer: How do you find your stripper name? Isn't it like your first pet and the street you grew up on.

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah so, I stole the street I grew up on, so. My first pet was Diane, so I didn't think that would work for the stripper name. It's a terrible dog name.

Interviewer: I think it's hilarious when people name their pet like actual human names for dog names. Like my friend has a cat named Rhonda. Rhonda the cat.

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, it was Diane the Saint Bernard, so.

Interviewer: So, there's a lot of terms in styles of drag, you know, varying from drag queens, kings, glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, etc. Are there any particular labels you use to describe your drag? Or, if so, what is your type of drag?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, I would say like I'm kind of an old school traditional pageant queen. And that's kind of you know, not drag didn't start with that. It started, really, with just performers you know, like at Stonewall the first person to throw a stone was a black transgender sex worker. It wasn't pageant drag, wasn't that. But pageant drag came like really popular and became kind of an outlet for our community to come together every year. And that's what really attracted me to drag. And that's the style of drag I personally do all of the time. Very glamorous, I do a lot of older-school music, I'm not a top 40 artist, I'm not a dancer. I'm more of an actress that's kind of the venue that I follow and I just found that I really fit well into pageantry and that was where I found my niche. So that's what I'd use to describe myself. Kind of old school pageant queen.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Your type of drag, I mean I remember you mentioning you had that fundraiser yesterday, or you know all of these different events. So, would you say that your type of drag affects your life as a drag artist? Like do you think it opens new avenues for you to put on new events like this as a more of a pageant queen?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I think you, know it doesn't really matter the type of drag you do, it matters what your personal drive is for drag. I think that, well I know that there are club kids and there are people that do opposite types of drag that I do, that still put on very successful fundraisers and they do those things. I think pageantry has made it and opens some doors for me, especially in St. Louis, the very pageant-oriented town. Miss Missouri is held here frequently, there's a lot of Miss Missouri's that have lived here. I was the 45th, Vega is our 46th, so it's very old, and a lot of these bar owners have been around for a lot of that time. So, they just have good connections to that, and so being involved in the pageants and things led me to meet the right people to put these events on. So, in that aspect, that's really helped a lot of the fundraisers that I do. Like I'm doing another one next week, I'm coming in and doing a turnabout show and painting a bunch of faces for people, and I'm bartending the event afterwards, so just kind of being in a role, like Miss Missouri, that's respected and looked up to has opened the door for people to invite me to those types of things. So, it definitely has helped.

Interviewer: That's interesting. So, I mean I know you kind of mentioned the original glam drag, but is there a specific person or instance that has influenced your drag?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Um, like I really gathered a lot of influence from a lot of people. I would say that my biggest influence in drag is my drag mother, Alicia. We just became really close over the past two years, but we kind of have like a unique, missed each other a couple times in life path, so I'm from Springfield, and I was one of the show directors at Martha's and

there had been only 5-6 of us in the whole time it has been opened, which is over 30 years. So very small group of us have ever been a show director. When I started doing drag, Alicia had already moved, but she was one of the like, first or second show directors and she was like a legend there, and like she had won Miss Missouri USA, and she had won USA at large, and like she was like this famous pageant queen who had moved to Florida, and so she was kind of a legend that I had always heard of and looked up to. And then we met a couple years after that, at a pageant when she had come back to Springfield. She didn't know who I was, or any of that, like just another guy she had met at the bar, because I wasn't in drag. But it meant a lot to me, and then when I ran for Miss St. Louis, I reached out to her to make my Mary Poppins costume, because she had done Mary Poppins when she won Miss USA at Large, I knew how incredibly talented she was. And we really just became really fast friends, but she's really changed, not necessarily changed the style of drag that I do, but she's really enhanced it and really helped me really hone in on it. And also she's taught me a lot about how to be the best person that I can be in this role. Because it is different, it's like being a celebrity without any of the pay. Like people are always watching what you're doing and they're always watching what you're saying and even when you don't mean for things to come across certain ways you just have to be a little more self-conscious of what you do and say when you're out. I mean she's really taught me how to do that, without changing my personality. She always said how to be a star without acting like one. And that's the lesson I've learned from her. So, she's probably been the biggest influence.

Interviewer: Okay, so we've been talking about if drag is political, and how there's so many ways to make your drag political and how you can have your voice heard, your stance heard I guess I should say. So, would you say your drag is political?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Um, I would say I don't consider my drag performances political. I don't think I have ever used my platform on stage to voice my opinion, as far as an entertainment setting goes. To me, you know drag is about helping people forget about life for a couple hours and giving them an escape from that, but on the other hand, I've made my political views known by volunteering my time and even my stage presence to stuff like that. Like I've done political fundraisers for people I believe in, I've done charity events for groups that might fall on different ends of the political spectrum that I align with, and that's how I show my support and make it political. But it's outside of when I'm being paid to entertain you. I try to keep politics and religion and anything really controversial out of the show atmosphere, and if I'm gonna insert that into drag, it's at an event specifically for that cause. And that's how I show my support.

Interviewer: So, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? You mentioned how you have to be a star without acting like one, you know, how to use your platform but not let it overcome you, I guess?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, it's definitely a unique lifestyle, I mean it's like having the best of both world and the worst of some at the same time. You know? Especially when you start doing pageants, like you start racking up titles and accomplishments and things, people start to look at you differently, and they look up to you, which is a lot pressure. One, because you have to act right when you go out cause people, you know, just like we do with celebrities, like a

celebrity goes out and does something that if you or I did would be fine. Like they got really drunk at the bar, and like hanging out of the top of a limo driving down the road or people take pictures and make them look like a mess, and the same stuff happens. So, you give up a little bit of your freedom to your privacy and normal mistakes a 20-something year old would make like drunk at the bar aren't acceptable to Janessa Highland to do at the bar. So that part is hard. But at the same token, I get a lot of perks and opportunities and so sometimes it's frustrating. But you know I just got to go to Colorado as one of the top five for Miss America and spent a whole weekend in Colorado, which was beautiful, they paid to have us come there and have a show, and that's something that I would not be able to do, you know, as Nick. It was probably a \$5,000-6,000 vacation, to go there, and it was something that I was privileged enough to get to do. So, it's a give and take. And sometimes, you want to pull your hair out, but other times it's really rewarding.

Interviewer: Cool, yeah you kind of have to find the balance of like living your best life, and you know.

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Knowing there's responsibilities that come with that.

Interviewer: Totally, you mentioned that you have a drag mother, but are you a part of a family, house or collective? If so, could you tell me a little about it.

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, so Alicia is like the mother of our entire family, the Markstones, there's a lot of us, but there are kind of some offshoots of that. Like when I started drag, the very first person to help put me in drag was Victoria Von Dutch, which was the same person I walked in and saw, my very first drag performer I ever saw. And like, was my roommate and we were really close, and she never really wanted any drag children, or a house to be in charge of, she just really helped me and gave me costumes to borrow, teach me how to paint my face, all of that. But the first actual drag mother that I had is Devion Mornett, and she's the show director currently at Martha's in Springfield and was when I was there. And I still call her Momma and she will always be my drag mother. But Alicia is like the mother of our house. Alicia right now, we live together and we're roommates, and so like really really close, still really close with Devion, but it's also a unique situation. Because all of the Markstones are different personalities and we also all performers, so all very exaggerated personalities. So, it's really beautiful but also at times we fight like any other family would, just happens when we fight we're a little more dramatic about it. So sometimes it's you know, a very beautiful thing, but you have to know going into it that you're dealing with people who are actors and actresses who can be high-strung sometimes.

Interviewer: Gotta pick your battles.

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, but it's most beautiful thing about the Markstones, to me, is that yes, we're very supportive of each other in drag and stuff like that, but we're also there for each other. Like these are the first people I'd go to with my problems, if something happens in my life, or if I need help outside of drag, or if I just need to vent or cry, and that's the relationship that we have. We watch out for each other. If somebody's really broke this week, we'll pick up the pieces behind them. We'll take them to lunch, and it's a give and take. It's really a family, not just being a clique out at the bar.

Interviewer: How often would you say you perform and where do you predominantly perform?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: So right now, I'm not on cast anymore, I've been on cast a couple different times in my drag career, so I performed quite a bit as Miss Missouri, which I just stepped down from, but I traveled the state with that. And then, locally, I perform probably anywhere from like 6-10 times a month, just kind of varies, it's all booked out a month at a time so one month I might be working more than others, but predominantly I work at Bar:PM, its where I was yesterday for that event. And then, I work probably twice a month there, on a weekend like Friday or Saturday and then I have one Sunday a month that I host. I work a lot at Rehab, in the Grove. Bastille every once in a while. Most mostly Rehab and Bar:PM. It's a really good time.

Interviewer: What goes into getting ready?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, you know, obviously, putting the makeup on and the hair and all of that stuff. And that takes, you know, it used to take me a long time when I first started, like 4 hours and now I can do it in like 45 minutes. But there's a lot of behind the scenes that goes into that. You've got to design your costume. There's a lots of ways to go about it like there's a lot of songs I just like pick a costume that kind of works that I already have, or I'll make a costume that works for a lot of things. But there is sometimes like you hear a song and you're like, oh my gosh I really want to do that, and you come up with a vision in your head. That's a long process. Of learning the song, then designing the costume, building the costume, and embellishing the costume, so there's a lot that goes into it. It just kind of depends. A regular, every day show, if I'm not doing anything like super unique, for that specific show, I kind of just pull pieces of what I already have, but especially when you first start and you don't have any drag, a lot of it was, I just heard the song on the radio, I love it, I wanna do it now I have to make the costume for it, especially when you start. There's a lot of work put into it.

Interviewer: What would you say are the biggest challenges in drag and being a drag artist?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Umm, I think, learning kind of what I said, like how to balance being popular and liked, and balance that in the responsibilities that people put on that. Like I said, you are kind of the party and people look up to you. I've had some really beautiful moments, like you don't even know the impact that you have on someone's life. You're out at the bar, and you happen to pick a song that really spoke to them, and they kind of look up to you from afar and you don't know if that person, in the 5 minutes you've talked to them, what impacts you've had on them. So that's a lot to understand. That's a lot to process, so that part is kind of hard. It's also kind of difficult on your dating life, it takes a very specific person who is willing to date a drag queen, because we do have these two separate lives, and we're always busy. I've had some relationships that didn't work out because they couldn't handle that I was popular, and everybody wanted to talk to me. It was a lot of pressure being Janessa's boyfriend, and not being you at the bar. Like always being referred to as her other half. So that's been a challenge. It can be exhausting. It can be a lot of work. There's lots of challenges but it's a beautiful blessing just comes with responsibilities.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or in the world?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: So what's really cool is that, I've had the opportunity to travel quite a bit with drag. Drag is like super regional and it's some of it's pageant based, cause there are like 5-6 really large national pageants, and each one has categories that specifically look for something different and like Missouri happens to be like a very heavily America state which is very traditional drag, very detail oriented, and big hair, big costumes and you know all of that. Whereas, some of the other pageant systems in other places that are really popular are more about creativity, or they're more about glamour, and being beautiful and natural looking. So that plays a part in the drag that's different, but even setting pageants aside, just aesthetics here are different. Here, you get a lot of old school glamour red-carpet type looks. And in Florida you get a lot of sexy, beachy looks, and in Texas they love big hair, here it kind of varies. So, it's cool to travel and see how different everyone is. When I went to that trip in Colorado, for top five in Miss America and we're all from different spots. So you had 2 people from Texas, me (Janessa) from Missouri, you had Alexis Mattel from Florida, and you had a queen from New York. So you had like Southern drag, Florida coastal drag, New York City drag, Missouri drag, middle of the state drag. So, it was cool to see in the show how different we all were. Everything from our costumes to our hair, to our song choices. It was all the same caliber, and everybody was stunning, and it was really fun, and a great show, but the variety was super unique.

Interviewer: Cool. So how would you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, so I am a cisgendered male, and so I identify as just a gay man. The whole nonbinary thing is kind of new to me, so I've never felt like that at all. I've always felt like a boy that happens to play a character.

Interviewer: What pronouns do you use out of drag?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I use he, and she, honestly when I first started drag everyone was 'gal'. When I first came to the gay bar everybody and all of your friends called you gal, or said "hey girl" and all that stuff. And pronouns weren't really an issue when I first came out, it's something that's very new. The generation behind me is kind of really embraced that. But I totally understand and respect that, but to me it's never been offensive. Like a lot of people are really delicate with "well do I call you Janessa?" or "do I call you Nick?" or "do I call you he?" or "do I call you she?" and in all honestly, most of my friends call me Janessa, or a lot of them call me Big Jan, that's kind of my nickname. So, we're out in a restaurant together, me Alicia and Brooklyn, and all of us have nicknames. We call Brooklyn Connie, and [pronouns] never affected me or bothered me.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced your sex or gender identity? If so, how?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Not really, at all. I've always kind of kept them separate. You know there are a lot of different people who do drag for different reasons, and mine was always kind of the theatrical escape. I'm more of an actress and I've always been known for my ballads

and slow songs and I actually use it selfishly a lot. I'll use a song that like portrays how I'm feeling and I can get my emotions out on stage and I get to tell a room full of 100 people how I'm feeling without ever telling them what the problem is. And they pay you to do it! So it's you're paying me to be my counselor. So that was my motivation. But a lot of people, including members of my family, they do drag because they did identify as a girl, and they didn't know how to go about that, so they kind of started in drag and then they became transgender. Even some of them have quit drag once its served its purpose, and they're just transgender people now. So it hasn't ever been my motivation. I've only ran across a couple people, I dated a guy I think was attracted to Janessa, also attracted to Nick, but also had some attraction to Janessa. And I tried to keep an open mind about it, but it just isn't for me. I can't identify as Janessa sexually.

Interviewer: That's interesting, that's something I never would have considered. Do you think you're theater background has kind of influenced having the contrast between Nick and Janessa?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah I think I definitely do, I mean cause doing drag really was a theatrical escape. When I was younger, I always wanted to be a Broadway star, but not everyone gets to do that, like this is my outlet to still be involved in theater and to do something that I love, and perform. At first I didn't realize how powerful it would be, but now that I've realized this is my character and I write her script, she is everything I want her to be. It's really cool to have your own character that you get to play throughout your life. So it definitely did. She is an exaggerated version of Nick, but a completely separate entity. She doesn't really have a sex life. So that's all been reinforced by that. Absolutely.

Interviewer: How has drag impacted/changed you?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I think it's helped my self-confidence. Like I was not a very confident boy. And I still am a little shy and a little reserved as a boy as opposed to Janessa, we are two totally different people when we go out. So I think it's helped really build some of the characteristics that Nick lacks, or isn't so strong in. It's really easy to go out, she doesn't exist. She's a mask, the makeup is a mask, and the hair is a mask, and you can be ostentatious and over the top and push boundaries and stuff while you're in drag, because that's what is expected. She's supposed to be over the top. But it's also taught me some great life lessons. Interview is one of the categories at Miss America, you sit in front of a panel of 5 judges, and doing that allows me to go to a job interview with one person like "this is all you got?" "You're the only one here?" So it's easy. A lot of that has transitioned over. it's also really allowed me to do things that I've always wanted to do but can't afford. Like the traveling and things like that. But also to give back. I've always believed in charity and things like that. And if I can write a check to fix problems that I think are important I would, but I can't and this is an opportunity to use something that doesn't cost me anything but my time and my talent to raise money for a cause that I believe in. So that's a great outlet that Nick doesn't make enough money to do.

Interviewer: If you could go back and as Janessa, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: So I always kind of compare this drag to growing up in real life as well. You start, and you're super eager and excited and you're kind of starstruck by these people that are more seasoned than you, and their teaching you these tricks, and you're really

eager to learn. Then you start to get good, and people start to tell you how pretty you are, even if you're not at the time, and you kind of get into this like bratty teenage years, where like you know everything and you don't need them anymore, and you're the new kid in the scene, and that's just the old lady. You know that bratty phase. Hopefully you come out of that, not everybody does, luckily I did. I don't know that I could change it, and I don't know if I would want to. I think it's made me the person that I am now. But I would like to go back and tell younger Janessa to be a little kinder to people, and not be quite so mean. Like don't get so wrapped up in the compliments and become a mean girl. It's natural. It's like the popular girl in high school, she's mean all of the times and when you become popular, it's kind of intoxicating. You kind of get drunk on all that love and compliments and being in positions of power, being a show director. Until you grow up a little more in drag you don't realize all of the responsibilities that comes with it and sometimes you do things that you'll have to apologize for later.

Interviewer: That's interesting. I'm curious on how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice versa, how has impacted your identities. And could you share one or more of your social identities, such as race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality or the interaction of these social identities have impacted your experience of drag?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, and everybody's a little different, some people keep things a lot more separate than I do. Because I've been around for so long, and pronouns have never been a thing, I've never forced people to keep me separate at the bar. Nick doesn't really have a huge social presence in the gay community. Like I go out, but people still recognize me as Janessa out of drag. I don't mind it so much, sometimes it's a little frustrating cause sometimes you just wanna go out and like go somewhere everyone knows your name and drag isn't what we're talking about tonight, or you wanna go flirt with a boy that doesn't look at you as the drag queen on stage last night. So that part of it has kind of been impacted a little bit. But I'm really happy with Janessa's social presence, like I said, the perks that come with that, I'd definitely say she has a much more social presence in the gay scene than Nick does. And I've had to use other outlets for Nick's social presence. Although I have friends that don't do drag, I'd say my social life revolves around drag, which is my passion so it's okay, but it definitely has shifted the more years I've been involved in drag, the less the social presence Nick has.

Interviewer: So, this is kind of just your personal ideas about drag, so how would you define drag overall?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I would say a couple years ago I was really matter of fact that drag is a man or transgender woman portraying the ideal woman. I didn't understand club kid drag, I didn't like it. I actually in my bratty years spoke out against it that I didn't think it should be in bars. But the older I've gotten and the more open I've been to at least going to see it. I would define drag as any kind of performance art, that is street legal that you want to put on stage. It's an exaggerated version of real life. It's just all about exaggeration. I still believe that if you're going to do drag differently, you're going to be a club kid, or you're gonna be a bioqueen, you should strive to look like everyone else in the show as far as quality goes. So if you're going to be a club kid, there's this performer, his name is Axel Andrews, I actually really admire him, I think he's incredibly talented. He does club kid drag, he's boy bodied but does all kinds of

exaggerated makeup sometimes he does characters, other times he's like kind of normal-kind of drag face. But the caliber to which he does his art form is the same caliber as the national entertainers, and the national title holders that are in the show. So they're doing traditional drag and he's doing something totally opposite. Like they look like they fit in the show together. So that's kind of my new approach to this, I love all types of drag, I think it's great a variety in the show, but everyone has to look like they fit in the same category of drag.

Interviewer: Can you explain what kid club drag is?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Yeah, so there's a lot of club kid performers at Attitudes. Club kid was kind of the all-encompassing term for bioqueens, nonbinary, before all of those- you always had like drag king and drag queen and those were kind of the two, then club kid came into the scene and picked up all of the pieces for everything else that was left out of those two groups. Club kid is probably a little outdated, I don't know I'll have to look that up, if that is still used, but that was always the term I was kind of taught, but it's kind of an umbrella to cover everyone that didn't do traditional, pageant girl drag. They're doing something different, performances artist might be more of the direction they're going now instead of club kid. I think the club kid scene kind of started in like rave bars and stuff like that, is there they found their niche. So it probably it a little outdated. Maybe performance artist is the right word, I don't know I'll have to look that up.

Interviewer: Thank you for that, cause I had no idea. So what do you think is the overall purpose of drag?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I think that it serves two overall purposes. It's a creative expression for the performer themselves, and it in my time, I found that most entertainers they gave baggage and have something broken about them, and there's something that they've been through, and this is kind of their way for coping with that, growing and some of its hiding and some of it is giving them an outlet to do things that they may not be comfortable to do for themselves, so I think it serves that purpose for the actual person performing. But I think for all entertainers, our job and the other purpose is to help people forget about how their life sucks sometimes. It's an escape from your bad day at work, it's an escape from your fight with your boyfriend or girlfriend. It's an escape for a tragedy that's happened, it's a safe place for you to laugh, or cry, or wanting to get up and dance, or smile like that is the whole purpose of entertainment. That's why we have movies, and books, and TV and drag queens. It's an escape from life.

Interviewer: That's a really interesting comparison. Obviously it's a form of entertainment, but the comparing it to movies or books I've never considered. Do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: It's not for me, but it definitely is for some people. I think a lot of thing have changed in the past 10 years. When I started drag, there was no Grindr or Bumble or Tinder, you go to a gay bar and that's how you meet people. I think back then, and especially older entertainers, because that's who I've kind of been around, a lot of them whom are transgender used drag to get into that and express that. Because being transgender was a much

more taboo thing 20 years ago or 10 years ago, compared to drag, that still was taboo, but not as taboo in the gay community. So I think for those people who identify as female or nonbinary even now part of it might be sexual, or maybe just their sexual character that they have. But for me, I've never seen it as sexual, but I could see how it could be that way.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts on RuPaul's Drag Race?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I honestly am not a very big fan of RuPaul's Drag Race. I think it's done some incredible things as far as bringing drag to the mainstream, but I also think it's done some incredibly detrimental things. They portray us as a very catty way, because it's reality television, which is understandable. But they've also caused a large income disparagement between local performing drag queens. In all honesty, a lot of the people on the show aren't very talented. And they show up to work and they're a mess, they show up in a \$20 dress from Amazon, and they're gonna get paid \$6,000 dollars. The caliber that they bring isn't the same caliber as the people working for free or \$25-\$50 locally. That's caused a lot of issues. They're also not very nice people. I've worked with 7 of them in my career, and a lot of them have been very incredibly kind people. Chad Michaels, Alexis Mateo was really great, Raja was really great, I won't say the names of the others that weren't so great. The last interaction I had with a RuPaul's Drag Race girl was at a pride event in Missouri, and there was an entire cast of local queens, by local I mean we drove from all over the state. We came in a very low price to be there, the show was supposed to start at 10, she didn't show up until 10:45. And she had been in town all afternoon, was sleeping her hangover off from the night before where she was posting all over Instagram that she was out partying and probably doing some things she shouldn't be doing. When she arrived at the show, she didn't even know what music she was going to do, she was 45 minutes late, she wore two Amazon stretch dresses you could buy for \$19.95. She pulled out a plastic sac to put on, and she was incredibly rude to the cast of entertainers that she had already been rude to for not showing up. She didn't recognize the cast or any of their importance. When someone introduced themselves as a national title holder she responded, "oh honey everyone thinks they're a star". And it was that kind of attitude and that's what's traveling the country representing drag, and I think it's incredibly disappointing. Big bummer. You're given this platform and an incredible amount of money and opportunity. Like I said, not all of them are like that. It's been the younger ones that have been like that. There are people on the show that have started drag like three months ago, and I don't think that is an accurate representation of what their best drag in the country is about. The purpose of the show isn't to put the best drag in the country, it's to put the messes on television, and picking one of the better ones to win. But those messes are the ones traveling the country representing drag and getting booked, because they're on TV. So that part I don't care for.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, drag community, etc. what would it be and why?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I think the biggest issue I'd like to change is a multifaceted issue and is kind of like a merry-go-round. There's no way to really fix it, it's just going to evolve around time. I wish that it paid what it was worth to do. I wish it was more financially beneficial. Not that that's why most of us do it, but that has changed a lot. When I first came out to the bars,

before Grindr and being able to find a boyfriend/girlfriend from your couch, you had to go out. So drag was very well supported. When it was less mainstream, it was supported less by the community because it was theirs. It was the gay communities' celebrities. They didn't belong to everyone, they belong to just the gay bars. Gay bars are much more safe places. So it's kind of cool that we don't need that anymore, but I wish there was a way to bring that back to drag, because a lot of the entertainers that are older than me, who I look up to, that's all they've ever done their entire life, is entertain. And for the 20+ years they've entertained, they've made enough money to live comfortable lives. They never made enough money to be wealthy, but they made enough money to live by. And never really planned for an end to that, because they didn't ever see it coming. And now, the community is saturated and more mainstream. A lot of those people have been left some homeless and jobless, and no support from the community they spent 20 years entertaining and raising money and more of that. So I'd like to find more of a stable place. And there are some things that have happened to fix that, drag has kind of evolved the gay bars and a lot of places don't even identify as gay bars. They are everybody kind of bars but there happens to be a lot of gay people and drag shows. But there are some venues, like Hamburger Mary's, and there are more venues that have opened up that cater to a much wider audience that are giving drag performers a more stable income to make up for the difference the gay bars have left out. But unfortunately there's just not enough of them open to support drag. So I'd like to see that change.

Interviewer: What do you think are the misconceptions people have about drag? Where do you think it comes from? And how do you think you can help to change that?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I think the very first one, especially if you're the first drag queen anybody's ever met, and they start talking to you, a lot of people don't understand, like my mom asked me, "do you want to be a woman?" that's the first question. And it's a very valid question. If you knew nothing about drag that would be the first question I would ask. I think a lot of the other misconceptions are the cattiness and the drama, and all of that that is put on national television. I think the way you change that is doing exactly what we're doing. Just talking about it. I get wrapped up in these conversational a lot when I'm out at the bar because I'm passionate about it, and people ask me questions and I'm okay with answering them, and the more you talk to people, they ask a lot of questions and you can kind of change their opinion. I'm really fortunate and one of my passions is a non-profit cinema in Jeff City, and I host a drag show there about 6-8 times a year. Jeff City is incredibly republican and is also the heart of Missouri politics. And because it's a non-profit cinema and a fundraising show we donate all of our tips back to the cinema to help fund them. They show very taboo movies and things and their whole motto is education through art. Which is something I'm very close with in my drag. There's a lot of liberal people in Jeff City who will bring their friends out, but a lot of times they will bring people out who don't necessarily want to be at a drag show. They come in with one conception, and in the end I'll have conversations with them and they say thank you for changing my perception on this. And the only way you're going to do that is to continue to put it out there and talk about it.

Interviewer: Lastly, if you could change one thing/learn about drag, what would it be?

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: I think it would be, that's a tough question. I think I would want them to learn there are people behind the performer. I think that is most important to remember. I think it's really easy to see us out every Friday and Saturday, and that's our job, we're supposed to be the party. But you have to remember there is a person behind that entertainer. There's a lot of bashing of entertainers online. She's busted or she's terrible and everyone's drag is different, everyone's audience member connects with a different entertainer. There are some people that think I'm incredibly talented, and there are other people who think I'm really boring. And that's okay. I appeal to certain people and not others. But I think some people forget sometimes that in their passionate praise of one entertainer, or their expressing that they don't like another entertainer, they forget that there is an actual person behind that persona. Who does have feelings, and they can get hurt. So I think that that's the thing I would want people to learn.

Interviewer: Awesome, I appreciate it very much!

Janessa Markstone-Mornett Highland: Of course!

Interview with Jenna Cydal

To cite this interview please use the following:

Diskin, Valla. 2020. Interview with Jenna Cydal. *Sociology of Drag*, SIUE. April 13, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/jenna-cydal/>

Interviewer: When did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Jenna Cydal: The first time I heard about drag was actually the movie, *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*. I was, like, real young, my mom watched it and we were watching it, I loved it, obviously. So, it was one of my favorite movies growing up and it is still one of my favorite movies now. I don't know, I was like, oh gosh, that came out in the 90s, or maybe before, I don't remember, I was real young.

Interviewer: I've definitely heard of that movie, but I've not seen it.

Jenna Cydal: It's good, you should watch it.

Interviewer: When did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Jenna Cydal: I actually just thought about that so I'm glad I did. I've been performing for eight years now. I started, the first venue I performed at was with Glitter Bomb, I think now Rydr does the Young and Reckless shows. I don't remember what the Glitter Bomb show was called when I first did it, oh, Boot Camp, it was called Boot Camp. I did that eight years ago and I did it because all of my friends were performers and my drag mother, I say this with quotes, pushed me to do it and signed me up and I just kinda went with it so I did it.

Interviewer: Alright, so, how did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Jenna Cydal: I don't think it was really a surprise. I grew up doing theatre, so I was always kind of performing in some sense. My parents have never been to a show of mine, but they've been to drag shows before. But they didn't really care or see it as a surprise, I don't think. There was no real extreme reaction either way, they were just like "okay."

Interviewer: That's good! Alright, so, where does your drag name come from?

Jenna Cydal: My drag mother gave it to me. Her name is Suzy Cydal, she doesn't perform anymore. But they're puns. Hers is a pun on suicide, mine is a pun on genocide, so it's Jenna Cydal.

Interviewer: Oh, wow! Okay, I never... I'm really surprised I never caught that.

Jenna Cydal: Actually, a lot of people don't catch that and I'm kinda surprised, but I think that they're obvious, but I guess now after so many people are like "Oh I never got it" I guess it's like a normal reaction. But yeah, she's Suzy Cydal, hers is suicide and I'm Jenna Cydal I'm genocide.

Interviewer: Okay! I like it. So, there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, so there's drag queen and drag king, glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen, and camp queen, among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Jenna Cydal: I'm a drag artist, I guess. Generally, I would say that, I guess now it's not referred to as a bioqueen anymore, they're referred to as AFAB performers which is assigned female at birth, because gender is so fluid, they don't want offend anyone and I guess that seems to be the most neutral way of just describing it. But if I had my option, I would just say that I'm a drag artist because while I generally perform on stage as a queen, however you want to label that because I go on stage as my assigned gender, but I go fluid with it too. We do turnabout shows or if a show calls where I feel like it's more appropriate for me to switch my onstage gender then I will do that even though I'm not somebody to take seriously when I perform as in male form, I look super ridiculous, like an 80s outcast or something, it's bad, it's really bad. But if I feel like a show is more appropriate for being more gender fluid than me performing as a queen then I'll do it and I've done it several times. So, drag artist I guess.

Interviewer: So, you do both female and male performances?

Jenna Cydal: Definitely more female, for sure. Just because I'm more comfortable with it on stage, but if I feel something deserves more of a bend than just being on stage as a queen, then I'll bend it. I'm not afraid to push a limit or offend people with that, I guess.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the term bioqueen? Like you yourself?

Jenna Cydal: It doesn't offend me at all. I see why it is offensive, I guess, to some people. But it is not something that offends me because I am and was biologically born female, so it is what I am. But I would prefer not to be called a bioqueen. I'm a drag queen, a drag artist.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense, so, does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist and if so, how?

Jenna Cydal: You mean like, putting me, er- hindering me in some form or some way?

Interviewer: It can be that or if it hinders you or makes you feel better.

Jenna Cydal: I'm far more confident on stage than I am in real life. Far more. But, I feel like I do get less recognition because of the type of drag performer that I am. St. Louis has a lot of classic views on drag where they want drag queens, pageant queens, which is why you see bars like Hamburger Mary's do so well because they stick to the classic. There's nothing wrong with that, I appreciate all different forms of drag, but I wish people were more open-minded because I get booked with the same producers and the same venues because people don't want to branch out and book something that's completely different and I'm different and people think that I'm stepping on toes. I feel like I get held back a little bit, so.

Interviewer: So, who or what has influenced your drag?

Jenna Cydal: I don't necessarily know if it's a who, but I do appreciate comedy forms of drag. I appreciate horror and creep. I obviously appreciate more of a sexual form of drag. I guess it is like all over, but if I had my choice of it, I would probably go more towards camp and horror, for sure.

Interviewer: Do you consider your drag political? Why or why not?

Jenna Cydal: No. I prefer to stay neutral in my drag. Again, if I get booked in a show where I feel like it's important to portray a certain message and I have been booked in shows where messages are, you have to deliver, but generally speaking my performances in drag are not political.

Interviewer: Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? So, are you part of family, house, or collective and if so, can you tell me about it? You have kinda hit on that so, if you want to expand.

Jenna Cydal: Yeah, a little bit. So, I had a drag mother, I don't have a drag mother anymore and it's not just because she doesn't perform, but I just don't have a drag mother. I don't have one family that I belong to, but if I would say that I'm closest to a family that I feel is more accepting of me, it's the House of Controls. There's a lot of them. I wouldn't say that I'm part of the House of Controls, but I'm more like, like there's like mother, father, son, daughter like family and I guess I'm just the weird aunt that hangs out in the corner and sips some rum and Coke or something. But yeah, I guess like my obtuse family would be the Controls.

Interviewer: How often do you perform?

Jenna Cydal: A couple times a month. When I first started doing drag, I did drag and burlesque and I performed all the time and I was able to pay rent and stuff, but real life gets in the way, so you just have to take bookings when you have time. We have to prioritize. If I could prioritize drag, I 100% would, it's definitely more fun. On average, I would say four to five times a month.

Interviewer: Where do you usually perform?

Jenna Cydal: Attitudes is where I get booked the most. I'm sometimes at Rehab, not too often and I will do the college shows. This is the first year in a while that I'm not at the Webster Drag Ball, but like I said, I get booked at SIUE and I'm doing a college show in St. Charles, I think in a few weeks.

Interviewer: What goes into getting ready for a performance?

Jenna Cydal: A lot. I guess from like starting you have to, obviously, pick your music. You have to pay attention to theme and sometimes that takes me a few days, so you have to think about that constantly. Then, preparation for show day is like two hours worth of makeup, got to pack, then takes time to get into drag and costume so kind of, a lot. But the biggest part of it for me, I guess, would be makeup. While I perform on stage as a female, most people find it surprising, it takes me about two hours to get in drag face.

Interviewer: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Jenna Cydal: I think for me personally, it's, I guess what's hard for me, is not being taken seriously or people overlooking what it is that I do because of how I do drag. I think that's my biggest hurdle I have to conquer and I don't think it's one that I will until people have a different mindset on drag and I feel like it's definitely more open and accepting because when I first started drag there were only two, three bio performers and now there's more so I think the biggest thing for me that holds me back is the way that people view or appreciate my drag which I don't feel like everyone does.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live? So, like, is there anything unique to like the drag scene in St. Louis compared to other places in the country or the world?

Jenna Cydal: I think St. Louis is highly overlooked in drag. I think it's super versatile. Like I said, you have the classic queens, you have camp queens, you have people that are doing alt drag which is something I would probably put myself in that box. The norm is so accepted and then you have shows, like RuPaul's Drag Race that over-accentuate one certain type of drag which is more of the classic pageantry drag. But then there's this whole other art form that is so completely overlooked, which I think St. Louis probably has the most of, which maybe is why the queens here are overlooked and aren't on shows like RuPaul's Drag Race because several of them have auditioned and none of them have made it. The closest we got was Monique Heart in Kansas City, but even that's not St. Louis. I think Kansas City even has a completely different drag scene than we do. Like I said, I feel like the majority of our scene artists here are alternative drag artists and I don't think that it's as appreciated as it should be because there's a lot of talented people here that just, St. Louis doesn't get the recognition it deserves in drag.

Interviewer: What is your gender expression like outside of drag?

Jenna Cydal: I live my life as a female.

Interviewer: Is your drag more feminine than your gender expression outside of drag?

Jenna Cydal: I guess, yes and no. I'm not super glammed up right now, but it's my everyday life and I came here from work, so I guess I just express it in a different way. I think if I'm, if me, myself, I'm going out then I do like to dress up, but you can obviously differentiate from me out of drag living how I want to and going out dressed up as opposed to how I dress up in drag. It's definitely over the top.

Interviewer: How has drag influenced how you see your sex and gender identities?

Jenna Cydal: It hasn't. I've always seen myself the way that I do. Like I said, the only thing that I would see completely different is that I'm more confident in drag, but it's also taught me to be more confident outside of drag, I would say. So I guess in a sense that has helped me because I grew up in a small town where people don't really build you up there, in that sense, so when I left there and came here and people were so interested and people pushed me to get on stage I was just like "oh okay." So, I guess it's taught me to be a bit more confident in myself.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced how you think about gender overall? Not just your own, but just overall?

Jenna Cydal: I guess, yes and no. I've always been super open-minded to how people want to live their life, it's literally none of my business and you should just accept people for who they are and how they want to be. It literally has zero impact on you, none. It takes you zero effort to just let someone be, than opposed to hating on how they are. It's completely ridiculous to me that people view... I don't know that's a whole other subject. But as far as drag influencing my opinions on gender or how I view it, no it maybe has just opened my eyes a little bit more because I'm so involved in the St. Louis drag scene that I guess, it's a constant conversation. I'm just more aware and more active in the conversation than I think I would be outside of drag.

Interviewer: Do you think that your sex and gender identities have influenced your drag at all?

Jenna Cydal: Yeah, since I go on stage as a female, it definitely influences it, but then again, I'm not afraid to push a boundary or flip it or bend it, but as far as my regular life I don't push boundaries or let gender norms, I just kind of live my life the way I want to. I identify as my assigned gender, but I would say in drag then I kind of push it a bit more I would say.

Interviewer: How has drag impacted or changed you? So, you've kind of hit on this, but if you want to expand on it more, you can. So, has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag and if so, how has it?

Jenna Cydal: Yeah, like I said, I grew up in a very small town. Very, very small town where people don't uplift anyone, I feel they more focus on bringing a person down. I know when I lived in my hometown, I had zero confidence and zero self-worth in myself and then I went to The Complex for the first time, I want to say in like 2009 and everybody was so interested and it was just like I don't know a new face or what, but the first time I went there, people were like just coming up to me and I was not a performer and it was the people that I'm friends with now and some that have moved away that were just like so interested and just so welcoming and that was not something that I experienced in my hometown. So, when they pushed me to do drag, I wouldn't say that I thought about it too hard because I was in awe of what they did, the complex is probably the first time I saw it live myself and I think the first show that I went to was a Glitter Bomb show and know that Siren and Lola van Ella were there, she's the big burlesque performer in St. Louis, but she lives in New Orleans now, and they did some Lady Gaga inspired number and I was so like "what the hell is this?" She was doing live vocals. Siren was performing as a drag queen, but they were performing together like so perfectly. I'm just like, "do people rehearse for this? What do they do?" I was so interested. And then the fact that all of them took some sort of interest in me and then kind of pushed me to be on stage. I don't know, it just kind of like, my whole mindset kind of changed in that sense. I was just like "I am more than my small town" which is exactly how people drive you to be is like you're nothing more than where you came from and where I came from is not impressive by any means. Once I got on stage, it wasn't something I was unfamiliar with because I had been performing since, like, the first time I was in a play, I think I was like four or five. So, it was something that I had been doing, but I hadn't done in a period of maybe four years. It was something that I felt comfortable with, but as I've been on stage it's helped me. I'm not a nervous person in front of people anymore or as nervous and I can easily go up to a group of people and just talk to them because I kind of have to because drag is a job whether it's a fun one or not, it's still a job. I'm able to engage more. I'm

able to see myself differently because I'm more confident and just able to just go up to random groups of people and talk to them.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Jenna Cydal: Like how far back are we talkin'?

Interviewer: As far as you want to go, honestly. You could do like four or five or you could do like teenage years, whatever like you want to talk about.

Jenna Cydal: Probably teenage years. None of what I was worried about matters, literally nothing. High school doesn't matter. Your friends then, some of them I'm still friends with, but the way people view you do not matter because I literally don't care how any of them see me now. They have much more of an interest in my life now that I've moved and they see me on all of these flyers and they see photo shoots and my name somewhere and now they have an interest in what I do because I did break away from my hometown norms, which is just to get married, have kids, and then stay where you are and I left and there's few people that did leave and they always seem to have some kind of interest. It was hard when I left for a while because people did start rumors. My mom would go to the gas station and people would make some kind of remark about me being gay or a homewrecker or something, it got really crazy I tell you, but that did upset me because these were people, and I hadn't been gone for very long, that I still viewed as friends and then I realized that it just didn't really matter what they thought. My mom didn't care and she knew better, so she didn't care and because she didn't care, I started to just pretty much just say "fuck it" I don't really care what you guys think of me, how you see me, you have an interest in me because I'm doing something completely different than any of you have even heard of. So, just that none of it mattered before I left, really.

Interviewer: How has drag impacted your social identities and/or how has your social identities impacted your drag? So, these social identities can be anything from gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disabilities etc.

Jenna Cydal: I would say that drag has more so affected my personal life than my personal life affecting drag. Two things that you mentioned there were race or ethnicity and then sexual identity. I would say that drag has pushed me to be more accepting to fact that I'm Hispanic. Even though I look predominantly white, I'm still half Hispanic and there is not a lot of representation in St. Louis drag for that. It's something that I'm pushing myself more to just bring forward more so in drag because there is not Hispanic representation. For my sexual lifestyle, I was in a relationship for five years that I got out of a year and a half ago and when I started dating again, I had to actually realize that I needed to change my name on the dating sites because people would recognize me on the dating apps. More so people that were like bi or pansexual that were open to dating everyone would be like "Oh my god, you're Jenna Cydal" and I would have my personal information on there, so I had to realize that maybe wait and not put so much out there right at the beginning of that and it's still something that I have to hide on dating apps because I do see people on those apps that I see at shows and I don't want to necessarily mix my two lives. I'm pretty open in my personal life that I do drag, it's not something I hide, I'm really proud of it and

it's a lot of fun, but I don't want random people from shows knowing everything about me. Definitely drag has affected my personal life more than my personal life ever affecting drag.

Interviewer: So, just a little bit about your ideas about drag. So, how do you define drag?

Jenna Cydal: Expression, art, self-awareness really. It's all open to me which is why I wish people had more of an open mind because.. so, my drag name in general, I feel like people here are very close-minded or take it too seriously or too literally. I know that the word "genocide" is associated with a mass murder of one group of people. However, that's not it's defining definition. This is just one example of the close-mindedness that I feel like St. Louis has. People thought that I hated a certain group of people or that my name was insensitive to certain group of people, which I get why, but it's not what I portray on stage. I've never done anything on stage that has hinted to me ever associating my name with what people associate it with. I feel like I've done a fairly good job, so I thought, of associating it with the fact that I just want to kill it on stage and kill it for a crowd and not one set of people. That's an example of the close-mindedness I feel like St. Louis has towards that and that comes from people even inside the community just being so close-minded to it or taking art so seriously when it's always been subjective. You might not like what I do, or you might not like what somebody else does, but that doesn't mean what they're doing isn't drag or it isn't art, so it's all about self-expression and whatever you feel like it is.

Interviewer: What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Jenna Cydal: Self-expression, getting your art out there, being who you want to be. I mean, I feel like I'm very much myself on stage with certain shows that allow me to be that way. The general pop shows I don't or the general Friday night, Saturday night shows, you're there to entertain, you are doing a job. People pay to see a show, so you have to give them one. So, sometimes you have to do stuff that you wouldn't necessarily want to. If I had any given chance to do Top 40 Pop or do some obscure Euro Pop song, I would choose the Euro Pop song over the Top 40 Pop any day, but that doesn't work all the time. It's just about, you just have to compromise both ways, I guess.

Interviewer: So, you kind of hit on this earlier too, but do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not?

Jenna Cydal: It can be and if you want it to be, it should be. But if you don't want it to be, then it doesn't have to be. Like I said, if I could do the horror and the camp all the time, I think it's more fun for me to be entertaining in a character sense because that is exactly what you're doing. As far as pulling a sexual side into it, absolutely, I have before and I will continue to do so. If it's what I'm feeling that night then I'm going to perform more sexually than I would say like at a Halloween show. I think it's whatever you want it to be. I don't think it should or shouldn't be either way.

Interviewer: How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Jenna Cydal: So, I have a lot of strong feelings about RuPaul's Drag Race. I am a fan of the show and I am a fan of the queens that are on the show and I've performed with the queens that are on the show and they're great people and in no way does this reflect anything of them, but I feel like because it's become so mainstream people have such a stupid idea of what drag is and what it should be that they don't

appreciate what is literally right in front of them. When I first started drag, the appreciation for it was completely different than it is now. Not that I feel like people should give money, but it was so much easier for people to feel comfortable tipping a queen doing, I don't want to say an easy number, but something more so emotional than high energy. So, I think it has warped the view of what drag actually is or what it can be. I feel like people think that they're experts on it now and if you're not doing what RuPaul's doing, then you're not doing drag and that is just total bullshit. So, I respect the queens, I respect the show, I respect what they're doing, but I hate how it has made mainstream view drag because that's just not realistic.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Jenna Cydal: Probably the way people view obscure forms of drag or different forms of drag. That it's not just classic queens that rule it. There's drag kings that I feel like that are completely under-appreciated that I would say are in the same box that I am, where you're held back and people don't take what you're doing seriously because they don't view it as drag, but what you're doing is drag. It's all subjective, it's all an art form, it's all a performance. We all spend two hours to get into face and get ready. I know drag kings that spend more time painting their face than a drag queen and take more effort and more time into their costuming than queens do, but they get by on a pass because what they're doing is what people know what drag is and that has to do with part of what RuPaul is putting out there, but I feel like if people just opened their eyes to what is in front of them and what kind of different forms there are, it's all still drag, it's just different. So just be more open-minded.

Interviewer: What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag and where do you think these misconceptions come from?

Jenna Cydal: Probably somewhat in the sexual orientation that everyone's like super promiscuous or... I think that's probably a big one. Or...that everyone is just promiscuous. Yeah, I guess promiscuous is probably the biggest one and I think it has to do with people don't know how to differentiate the person or the person that they are on stage. Because a lot of people in drag are sexual in nature. A lot of them are promiscuous in their personal lives, but that's their personal life. I feel like people think that like, I hate using words like sluts and whores now, but I feel that's what a lot of people view drag as, coming from an outside view. That was the biggest thing I had with the people from my hometown thinking that I was like this terrible, basically harlot of a person. So, I think that that's a big misconception. People don't know what they're talking about. They think that they see one thing and they have no idea who the person behind all the makeup is.

Interviewer: What do you think would help change those misconceptions?

Jenna Cydal: Getting to learn even what drag even is before forming an opinion about it. A lot of people just see something at face value and take it for what it is, but they have no idea who any of us are.

Interviewer: If you could choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Jenna Cydal: That it's for everyone and don't let anyone tell you that it's not. That as long as you have some kind of presence on stage, obviously you have to have some kind of natural talent on stage or some kind of ability to form into that talent, but it's still for everyone whether your performance form is interpretive dance, which there are drag artists that do that, or singing live on stage, which again, there are drag artists that do that. It's very different, but as long as you stay within a certain guideline, I guess, I hate saying that because I feel like it's against self-expression, but there's still basic terminology to drag. So as long as you stick to it, it is for everyone and I don't think anyone should tell you that you shouldn't do it.

Interview with Jessica Leigh Foster

To cite this interview please use the following:

Temko, Ezra. 2020. Student interview with Jessica Leigh Foster *Sociology of Drag*, SIUE. May 2, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/drag-artist-portrait/jessica-leigh-foster/>

Interviewer: Hi.

Jessica Leigh Foster: Hello.

Interviewer: How are you?

Jessica Leigh Foster: I'm doing well, how about you?

Interviewer: Good. Okay, hold on. Let me pull up these questions. Alright, so here we go.

Jessica Leigh Foster: Okey-doke.

Interviewer: So, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Jessica Leigh Foster: I was maybe like 13 and honestly, I didn't really know what to think about it because, I mean, I don't know. Growing up like my father was Baptist so I didn't really, I don't know, I guess I just kind of thought it was bad.

Interviewer: When did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Probably when I became 21 because I like to drink. And, I mean, a lot of times they get to buy you like, free drinks and shit, so it's like win-win, you know? Plus, I get to, like, do my make-up and stuff like that. And it's kind of invigorating, what are you laughing at baby girl?

Interviewer: Alright, question three how did your family, friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Baby, they don't know. Honey, like I said, we come from a religious background, so everything's low key. I mean my grandma still asks if I have like a girlfriend, so yeah. It's just kind of on the DL right now. I mean, they don't really want me to drink either, because, you know, but I mean...

Interviewer: I understand, where does your drag name come from?

Jessica Leigh Foster: To be honest, it's kind of hard to remember, because I'm pretty sure I just dressed up, like not like in drag, but I just kind of like wore, a little bit more feminine clothes, and I just got really drunk with my friends one night, under the table. Okay. And um, okay. I think there was this one dude and I like asked him, I was like, if I was a girl, what would you call me? And he was like, Jessica. And I was thinking, I was like, that is the most basic ass white girl name.

But I mean I like, I was fine with it cause even he was... it was fine, but, and I don't know, I think the other part, like I really liked the movie *Silence of the Lambs* and I really liked Jodie Foster and like I kind of thought Leigh was like cool. You know, so like Jessica Leigh Foster.

Interviewer: I like it.

Jessica Leigh Foster: Thanks.

Interviewer: Okay. So, there are a lot of terms for types and styles with drags, from drag queens and drag king to glamour queen and others. Are there any particular labels you would use to characterize your drag or what kind of drag do you do or style of drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Honestly, I think it would be more like traditional then anything. I don't know. Labels I think are good and bad. I don't know, like, it, kind of defines who we are as people. But at the same time I don't want to be put in a box. So, I don't know. I guess like, like I said, I would be more like traditional, but I would be open to like doing anything.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. Who has or what has influenced your drag? Hmm.

Jessica Leigh Foster: Honestly, like, watching RuPaul's Drag Race, like in my bedroom growing up, as like a secret. I get to watch all these fine, fine queens and like honestly, like, RuPaul, just in general, like she was a fucking queen and she slayed. So, I guess I would say like her, but at the same time I think our styles are a little bit different. But I think from each drag queen that I watch on that show. Some of them are crusty ass bitches. Let me just say that one, two, some of them have like real stuff to say. So, I guess everyone influences me. Plus, I think like some of the old bit- like, bitties in my church, well, like, what they would wear and like how they did their makeup, I would just multiply it by 10. I'm like, that's how we do.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you consider your drag political? Why or why not?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Hmm. I don't think so. I think I'm more just like kind of like in entertainment, cause, I like to make people laugh even though I don't like them. So, I mean I don't think it's political. I think you can make political statement with it. And I know that a lot of people do and I'm honestly like down for that. Like that's so cool. Like, the fact that we can like come together as like a community and we can show that we're not transgender, but we can support transgender people. Like I just think that's amazing. And then, I mean it's kinda like we're living like a double life. Like you'd come home, and you take off all the makeup, even the lights drag. And I just think that it opens so many doors for people and so many people in our community. And like with my, a couple of my straight friends, like they were not okay with me being gay. Sorry if you couldn't tell. But when I took him to a drag show, not one that I was performing at, it kind of opened their eyes a little bit. So in a sense I think it was political, and in a sense I think it's kind of eye opening. So take it how you want.

Interviewer: I like that.

Jessica Leigh Foster: Oh, I look crusty. My robes, they show money. People ask for this blushy cheek. But Hun, no.

Interviewer: Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?

Jessica Leigh Foster: I mean this is not going to be submitted to any like, like you know, this is just for your school, right? Okay. Honestly, it's a ball. Like, I mean clearly there's like the bars where you get to drink at, and, you know, Ms. Foster likes to get a little litty litty, you know what I'm saying? So we like to do that. That's what we like to do. Um, we really have a good time and I just think as a drag queen in general, I'm just tired, like all the time. Like I party pretty much. Not every time, but like my liver is probably like shot, you know what I'm saying? Like, it's like dying. Sorry, my cat keeps playing with me and I'm like "Pussy, back off." I guess dad was right, I was always a pussy magnet. But I think like in the scene, and in like, my performance it's kind of like, I'm a whole new person. Like I'm still me but it's, I don't know how to explain it. I guess it's like a part of me that is deep inside, and only gets to come out during that time. So, I think as I live through that, I think it's a whole new experience through a whole new story. What was your question again? I got to be honest I was like, halfway paying attention.

Interviewer: Can you talk about your life as a drag artist?

Jessica Leigh Foster: As a drag artist. Yes. Lots of partying, lots of fun stuff. Not too many boys. There's kind of like this thing going on within our community where it's like mask only. So, and I think there are some dudes who like femme guys, but I mean when you're in drag, it's kind of like a turnoff for a lot of guys. So I that's kind of not fun. I mean it's, I do get that on the DL though. Like, I don't know, it's hard to explain. Like just living my life as a drag artist I think is kind of unique in its own way, just because so many people you like you can walk down the street and there could be like a drag artist, like a drag queen, a drag king, and you would never ever know. I mean there's so many movies and like there's so much culture around it and so many people don't know about it. And I think that's kind of sad. But at the same time, kind of cool, I guess you could say because it's kind of like her own thing and living that is also a cool thing. So I hope that answers your question.

Interviewer: How often do you perform and where do you perform?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Mm, maybe like twice a month and then Bar:PM in Saint Louis. So yeah, I really liked the Saint Louis area. I really liked The Grove, it's a lot of fun, clearly that's our area. But at the same time, like, Saint Louis, this just so much fun. Ow sorry. My cat is like killing my arm.

Interviewer: It's okay, so what goes into getting ready for a performance?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Oh honey. Okay. First off, I have to have like two shots of either like straight up vodka, or like a whole bottle of vino because if I'm going to be like sitting down and doing my makeup for like, I don't know, 40 minutes. I don't like, glam up myself like too, too much, at least I don't think. But like, I don't know, I definitely want to be drunk for the beginning of it, that way, like time kind of goes like a little bit by faster and then you just start your makeup. I mean you just see all these beauty gurus and stuff like that, and I think everyone does their own thing. Like, with the contouring and like, do they like glue or tape their eyebrows and like, personally I glue it because I think that looks nicer. It blends in easier, and that way you can like contour to your eyeliner, eye shadows. So it just pops. You know what I'm saying? And after

that I kind of just like, hmm, I just kind of go into this zone where, yeah, I guess it's kind of hard to explain, because I just go into the zone. Like I'm kind of halfway buzzed, but we're just like becoming a fucking goddess, you know? So honey, you laughing at me again. I don't understand what is so damn funny. I'm just living my life. Okay. I'm living my life, straight up.

Interviewer: Well, okay, we're about halfway through the interview.

Jessica Leigh Foster: Oh, halfway, girl, that is fast.

Interviewer: So how do you identify insurance terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag.

Jessica Leigh Foster: Out of drag? I Identify as male. And I'm clearly gay, although I think there's many people on this spectrum, and I can understand that, and like I think people need to be more open to that, like gender fluidness, and how amazing like gender neutral people can be, like, kind of doing this stuff. Because only as like a male dragging it up. Like you kind of get into this like facade of being female and like she, she, she, "Ooh, yes honey. Yes, sister." And then, I mean, you still say these things like "Yes, sis. Ooh kill 'em sis," like outside of it. But like I definitely have a penis and I'm down for it. And I mean, I like being called a boy, but I also like being called sis. So...

Interviewer: What pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Sis, Sister, Huntie, Ms. Foster, Hey yo bitch, um, she, yeah, I mean like, I mean there's always those couple dudes who are outside the bar, and if they're not kind of like, with the thing, they're kind of like, ooh, look at that fucking tranny. So then I get called a dude every now and then, but honestly, it doesn't bother me.

Interviewer: So, so how do you identify out of drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Just honey. I feel like you've already asked this question, but it's okay. I identify as a male, so...

Interviewer: I mean the pronoun.

Jessica Leigh Foster: Oh, as a pronoun he, you can just call me he. Or sir, I really like sir. Kind of feels like I'm s- oh what's the word? Forget. I don't care.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities?

Jessica Leigh Foster: I want to say no, but I feel like it definitely does like in little ways, because like sometimes like when you're with a dude and you're in drag, which it doesn't make it happen very often for me, but it does happen. But like when you're in drag and he's giving you that blow out, it's kind of like, I don't know, kind of like a double sided. Because like I would like to be called like, you're fucking queen when I'm on top of you. Okay. Like if I'm in that, like I got like all the makeup, I've got my hair, I'm like, Ooh, yes, Daddy, pull. Like, you know, but not too hard, because that shit took way too fucking long. Just a little. But I mean, and then when I'm kind of like out of drag, like, I don't know. I call myself vers like versatile, like, you know what the top, vers, bottom thing. Okay. Um, I think more when I'm in drag I'm more bottom like, and it's, I

guess it's like, with being with a religious background, like we kind of, I've kind of like, have ingrained in my mind that females submit. And like you, kind of, I think as a bottom you don't submit to your partner, but like you kind of give yourself over, and like you kind of allow someone to control the situation while you're in it. And it's kind of sexy. But when I'm in, when I'm out of drag, and I'm like kind of like, I guess, more male. I mean I definitely bottom again, because that shit feels good. But like I definitely, like I can, I can hang. I'm not hung, but that's okay. I don't know. I just, I really like those Latino boys because they always be hanging, and sometimes they uncut and that's nice. So I would, I would definitely say more feminine. I think that I would identify more like sex wise, I, I'm still a male, but like gender in that moment, like in my head I'm kind of like, "Ooh, Ooh, I want your babies."

Interviewer: Okay. So, how has drag impacted or changed you?

Jessica Leigh Foster: I think it's definitely changed my life because one, like I said, my liver is like dying, two, I think it's opened up a lot of doors for me. Like, I've definitely made some lifelong lasting friends, and, I think, with me being in the community like this. I don't know, it's just like, it's kind of hard to explain to be honest. Yeah. I mean like how, how do you view me? Like from a non-drag perspective, you know? Yeah. So yeah.

Interviewer: Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Honey, you cut out, what'd you say?

Interviewer: Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are an out of drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Oh, hell yeah. Oh hell yeah. When I was in like middle school and high school I was quiet as shit. Because like, I don't know, I guess I was just kind of, like, scared to become whoever I really was. And then when I was in drag, like I, like I said earlier, I was like this whole new person and I can be whatever I wanted and I could say whatever I want and I could be a total raging, see you next Tuesday. Sorry Lord. But like I just kind of felt like I can be me, and I've noticed like as I progressed in this period of my life, like I've noticed that I've been more outspoken, I've been more fine with who I am. I've been more fine with how people are around me. Like if they don't like the LGBTQA community, like that's on them, I think that's wrong. But, at the same time I see myself and how I was when I was younger, so I can kind of halfway understand it as well. But for me, like confidence wise, knowing that I can walk into a place as an openly gay man and strut my stuff, and be fine with it, and not give a shit what people think about me or how I live my life. It's honestly been so freeing and the fact that like, I'm not saying that there are, but maybe they're like, maybe there's a little boy or a little girl out there and they're seeing me and they're seeing how I'm dressed in drag or out of drag. Say they can tell are their parents like, honey, you don't be like that man. He's so nasty. Oh, don't be like that. Well that's wrong. And yeah, they hear that it's wrong from their parents, but they can also see me living my life and how happy I look and how happy they can become, you know? So I think it's definitely like boosted my confidence and it's affected my life positively because I can affect others positively while being a bitch.

Interviewer: I love that. So how do you define drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: How do I define drag? I mean we all do drag, hashtag Birdcage. But like, I mean we all kind of do, because I think nearly every person on this planet, like they kind of have like this own mask that they hide behind. And not that I hide behind my drag, but I'm definitely like not my complete self, but I'm not-not myself. I don't know, I don't know if I'm making sense. But I think drag, to me, is just like a daily performance. Because life, you go through, I mean honestly, everyone's kind of fake. So when you're doing this, you're in drag and it's a fake and it's entertainment and it's a show and "ha-ha bitch, ooh, yes boy." But I think at least to me, like I said, I think everyone does drag in their own way. Like with men, they wear shirts that are a little too tight, so they show their muscles or they wear pants that are a little too tight or they don't wear underwear with basketball shorts glass up. And then like with girls, like yeah, they may not be doing like the whole drag makeup, like where it's like over the top or even clown, like clown drag, like, hmm (inaudible). But there's definitely girls who like kind of use their makeup as a mask and they use it as a tool to help give, like build their confidence. So I think drag is a confidence booster and I think that it's a way of entertaining our daily lives and not even realizing it.

Interviewer: I really liked the definition. Okay. What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: To be honest, I don't know. Like I think, like I said, like people kind of like take it as they will. I think for me, like I said, I like it. The entertainment portion, I definitely liked the partying portion, but I got to be honest, I forgot your question halfway through. Sorry, I've been sipping on this. vino for a fat sec. So...

Interviewer: So, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: The purpose of drag? The purpose of drag? Hmmm. I think it's, I think back to like the political statement. I think it's, I think some people use it as a political statement. Some people use it as entertainment. So, I don't know if it's like the purpose of it, being entertainment, or political or if it's like for me where it's kind of like freeing. So, I think it just depends on the person, or like in how the viewer like takes it honestly. Because I know when I first saw drag, I thought it was dirty, and I thought the meaning of it or like the purpose of it was like devil's work, and but now I mean clearly, it's not. So, I think it just depends on who you ask and the situation on their background and how drag and the history behind it has affected them and how they've seen it. So, I don't think you can put a purpose on something that is so fluid and open minded.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual, why or why not? And if so, how or in what way?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Again, I think it just depends. Like for me, and I think for many drag queens, like there's definitely like sexual innuendos within each, like performance. And I think that's like kind of part of it most of the time. Like, if you know a guy who's a big dick, like you're definitely going to like talk about it. So, I won't say that it's about sex, but I will say that sex is incorporated with it, which I'm completely fine with, this honey. Like I said, I loves the pain so, and honestly like I went to a performance for another queen and I mean she had like these fake titties and they were huge and I was like, yes bitch, fucking slay, I don't even like titties but girl! And like clearly that's fucking sexual, because like men, like they see a pair of tatas and they're like, so

yeah, I think a lot of drag queens, just incorporate sex into it. I don't think it gives off the vibe sex, because there's definitely drag queens who will, I mean they just do like lip sync performances and they're more for like the aesthetic and you don't have to talk about sex with them. And like I think, with some drag queens, that's pretty much like all they talk about. Like they want to be the slut, or they want to be the "ohh she's a fucking crackhead ohh" like, you know what I'm saying? Cause you know crackheads like dick. So, I mean maybe not all of them but like every one that I've known. So like, some drag queens are crackheads and they definitely incorporate their sex with her performance. Because I mean after you take a hit and you get a little horny, so you just want to talk about your experiences, you know?

Interviewer: How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Ooh Bitch. Depends on which season. Cause sometimes I'm just like, "Yes! I fucking live for it!" And then some seasons I'm like, "Hmm I can pass." But I will say RuPaul, I think, has influenced me the most because growing up and like kind of hiding, and sneaking around watching it, because it's been, it's been awhile around for a while. Like I think it's just, kind of like an eye-opening experience for future drag queens are kids who were in the closet and they're like, "That looks like so much fun. Like, I would love to do that one day." So I love the RuPaul's Drag Race, and like the idea behind it. I also love the fucking 'tudes, mm, honey. I love a good clap back. I love when the sisters have their claws out. Love it. Maybe because I'm a bitch. I don't know. I just, I don't know. I think it's just been amazing TV show. It's good quality. It's family entertainment, because, I mean, think about it, like with little kids, they have like some of these like PBS shows and they're fucking boring, and they teach them their ABC's when they could be watching RuPaul's Drag Race. I mean you learn about gender identity, you learn about gender fluidity, which are serious topics. But I mean, kids are smarter than what they seem. I mean they're little fucking assholes, but like they're smart. So, I think with RuPaul's Drag Race, and not only that, like you teach them social dynamics and like who's the fucking boss, and who's the queen, and like the pecking order and like, not that societies like a pecking order. Like I think it can teach little kids, and I think people in general, like how the world works. Like if you act like a bitch, you're, someone's going to act like a bitch back to you and like, yeah, I fucking live for it. But at the same time, like, you know, don't. At least to me because I will be a bitch to back to you and I don't give a damn. Sorry, I just had to pet my pussy real quick.

Interviewer: She's so cute. What's her name?

Jessica Leigh Foster: I know. Her name is Rosé because we do have some good vino. Yes. She just has the first name just like Madonna and Beyoncé. I mean, Beyoncé Knowles, but everyone knows her by Beyoncé.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, what do you think are the misconceptions people have about drag?

Jessica Leigh Foster: Like, I think everyone, not everyone, but I think a lot of people who are close minded and not open to the idea of it, I think they automatically, they're like, "Ooh, that person wants to be a female." And that's disgusting. That's not necessarily the case. I think there are some drag queens who would be fine with becoming transgender or sometimes they do

transition, like they find that they're more comfortable in that like state of mind and that's who they, who they feel they should be. And honestly, I'm, I'm for that. And I think a lot of people kind of get wrong because you brought up sex earlier and not every drag queen talks about sex, and not every drag queen cusses. I mean I do because again, I don't give a shit. But, like there's so many layers to it, and I think so many people just kind of like see it as a black and white situation where it's only this way or this thing. Like it can't be both. And there's, I just think that's kind of shitty. Because I mean, there are some queens who really do some good. I mean, they like raised money for like, I mean, Willam Belli, he is a straight fucking see you next Tuesday but, I love him. Oh my God, he's hilarious. And like, sorry, she, I live for her! Like she's honestly like, like with the Willam's Beatdown. Yes, honey slay. Like, she just don't give a fuck. But she also like wrote a song for HIV awareness and for the AIDS run and AIDS walk. Like, I think that's amazing. And I, I could be wrong, but I'm pretty sure like RuPaul has donated like so much money to like just all these LGBTQ programs and like, there's so many queens who help with like The Trevor Project and I think people just don't see that. They just see drugs, alcohol, dicks, tits, and like it's all a good time. Which, I mean, for most queens it is, but at this- like we all care about each other in this community. I mean even the bitch that I fucking hate, like I wish her the best in our community because, I mean, who knows, there's some crazy people out there. I mean I've been in drag and people have shouted at me while driving, and I've definitely been confronted it and like I've been scared for my life sometimes and just because people don't understand like how, sorry. I think people just kind of confuse like the idea of drag and the history behind it with other things, and they either see it as sinful or nasty and it's just honestly kind of sad and I wish it would get better. So, hopefully.

Interviewer: Okay, so last-

Jessica Leigh Foster: Ohh last question. Yes, we lives for it.

Interviewer: If you choose, if you chose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Jessica Leigh Foster: That's a good question. Hold on. Let a bitch think. That contour is not for everybody just kidding, just kidding, just kidding. I think I would just want them to know that there's so many things that go into, I don't think things is the right word that I'm looking for, but like I said, I've been hitting that vino. So, I think there's just so many options and so many viewpoints in the drag community, and I want people to know that. Because there's something for everybody, like, some people like a bitch and like I fucks with it. And some people are more like, Ooh, I just want to watch this bitch perform because she's fucking gorgeous. Look at her. Her dress is beautiful. That makeup, that hair, she spent all that time on it. So I think if I were, if I was to tell someone or want something to know something about drag, I would just want them to know how open it is and how they can be part of it because it's that open... I'm done.

Interviewer: Well thank you!

Jessica Leigh Foster: No problem! Bye bitch!

Interviewer: Bye!

Interview with Khatrina Jackson

To cite this interview please use the following:

Hartman, Tyler. 2020. Interview with Khatrina Jackson. *Sociology of Drag*, *SIUE*, April 29, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/khatrina-jackson/>

Interviewer: When did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Khatrina Jackson: The first time I heard about drag I was in high school. I want to say it was my sophomore year and it was not too long after I came out and my mom was trying to be supportive by pointing out other people were like black and LGBT plus. And she told me about RuPaul and suggested that I look him up and research him. And that was my first understanding of drag as far as like the way I look at it now and I was amazed I was like "What?" You know a black man is able to make more than just a living by doing exactly what they say that black men shouldn't or couldn't do? I couldn't believe it.

Interviewer: Definitely an interesting story. So, your first experience with it was through RuPaul then?

Khatrina Jackson: Yep.

Interviewer: So, when did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Khatrina Jackson: It was in the spring of 2010. It was my freshman year. I was a member of our local gay straight alliance at UL Lafayette. It was called GLASS, Giving Love, no, no at the time it was the Gay, Lesbian, And Straight Society is what GLASS stood for and the president at the time, Hailey Reed, and I think a few other people, they had the idea of having the very first drag show at UL ever. And UL was a very different place, what, ten years ago now. And as it was getting closer and closer to the drag show people were dropping out. And it was getting to the point that Hailey was getting worried she was getting nervous and I decided to step up and a role as a performer, so my first time ever doing drag like performance-wise is out of necessity. I was volunteering as tribute. There was another time that I had did drag but it wasn't, it was like that Halloween drag that's usually like the gateway for a whole bunch of people. Oh my God, no pads, no real makeup like, none of that stuff. But really the first experience that comes to mind was for the very first drag show at UL, which has become a huge annual tradition since then.

Interviewer: Oh wow. So, you helped start something new there.

Khatrina Jackson: Exactly. I even eventually became the president and was in charge of the drag show and stuff. It is a legacy.

Interviewer: Oh wow. How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag queen?

Khatrina Jackson: Well it was odd, because when it comes to me just coming out as gay, my sister was very supportive, she says she was waiting on me to do it, and my mom had a really, really, hard time and was just blind-sided and to this day I'm like "Really?" But all right. So, things started out that way. But when I started doing drag my mom, because between me coming out in high school and me doing drag in college, she was committed to educating herself and understanding me and the gay aspect of me more. So, you know she would actually help me buy wigs and all that type of stuff like she was supportive whereas my sister even though she came to one of the shows, she flipped on me. It was really weird like how my mom became the supportive one and then my sister no longer was, and she actually had an inkling of something that was going on that I didn't realize until, really, as of late. That through drag I was channeling some repressed parts of my personality which were actually really good parts of my personality. Such as my magnetism, my ability to perform, my ability to be sexy. She was able to see all of that on stage and she had never seen it before and she was blown away and felt cheated because I hid those parts of myself for so long because I grew up in a town where it would have been dangerous to be myself 100 percent so via my drag performance Khatrina Jackson, my drag persona, excuse me, I was able to breathe life into those aspects of myself that I had closed off. So, when at the time I looked at it as a betrayal, you know, when she turned on me after seeing me performing and all of that. Now I can see it as you know he's been hiding all of this from me all this time because what I ended up realizing is that Khatrina Jackson isn't a separate part of my identity it was just a disowned part of my identity. And I've actually been going through the process of integrating that. I'm sure that was a lot more than what you asked for.

Interviewer: No, that's fine, the more you say the better. That's an interesting view that I didn't really think about before. So, you said your drag name is Christina Jackson?

Khatrina: Khatrina Jackson!

Interviewer: Khatrina!

Khatrina Jackson: Yep! K-H-A-T-R-I-N-A Jackson.

Interviewer: Where does your drag name come from?

Khatrina Jackson: Well my sister's name is very close to Khatrina and Janet Jackson is favorite pop star and I was like "Who are my two favorite women in the world?" And at the time with my sister Janet Jackson and I combined them. I wanted my sister's attitude and I wanted Janet's like edge and performance ability.

Interviewer: Wow, that's a really good answer.

Khatrina Jackson: Thank you!

Interviewer: There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag from drag queen and drag the king to glamour queen, female impersonator, comedy queen, beauty queen, queer artist, bioqueen, camp queen, among many others, so are there particular labels you used to characterize your drag?

Khatrina Jackson: Not any that are pre-established that work as very clear-cut categories such as like you know, "Oh I'm a camp queen or I'm a I'm a pageant queen." Really, and this is this is where

it gets a little bit interesting. I never felt like when I was in drag I was any different than when I was not in drag. I always felt I was the same, but people observing me would say that I gave off a different air, that I came off as more confident. I was a little scarier because I was fierce. You know all of that type of stuff. And I'm like but it's just me and it turns out that it really was just a different aspect of myself that I didn't integrate into the larger personality that I have. But if I had to describe. Khatrina, Khatrina is commanding, Khatrina is sexy, Khatrina is dark but not in alignment like good and evil kind of way but in a mysterious kind of way. Yet at the same time considering all of that she's still very friendly. But as far as putting her to like a specific performance category that are very common is hard for me to do. It will probably take someone from the outside looking in to be able to do that for me.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you get a different reaction because your style is pretty much yourself instead of a particular kind?

Khatrina Jackson: When compared to other queens in general I would say no. But what I will say is that when it comes to Khatrina. Absolutely beloved, even though I wouldn't have even considered myself the best of the best. People just love me. As Khatrina, I have such star power and that actually led to complications later on because, especially when I had won Queen GLASS, while I was at UL, I was performing a lot for special events back to back. I was the most active queen like ever up to that point, and I was always doing stuff in the community on campus and off. And Khatrina was becoming very popular. Khatrina was the one that was receiving different opportunities and being treated well. Yet when I was Samuel it was like I was forgettable compared to Khatrina and I was becoming jealous of, what I thought was this fictional character that I created, that people were worshipping as this golden calf, when I'm the burning bush this entire time. And you know that is one of the seeds that were planted that caused me to step away from drag because I was like I can't stand the fact that people are treating her as more important than me. But, of course, I need to reiterate the point that I've gone through, now some time has passed since then, I've gone through some things and I've grown a lot and what I saw was that Khatrina was me. That was me. It's just that so many of my qualities were split off from me. In order for me to gain strength from them and to see what they feel like they became personified. In order for me to be able to animate them. And one of the reasons why I don't do drag now is it doesn't have anything to do with fear or any of that type of stuff anymore because I used to have all types of excuses but what it is at this point is that I don't need it because I used to need drag to do my makeup or wear a color on my nails. The things that I've always wanted to do just as a boy you know to have longer hair because I didn't know how I could integrate that because I'm like "Well I like having a male body" I don't consider myself to be trans but I have a lot of feminine energy and I prefer being beautiful compared to handsome. But how do I merge those two things. But eventually I started seeing examples of people who are the way that I am such as Prince which I overlooked quite a bit. Grace Jones, Courtney Act, Alonzo Arnold and Tokyo Stylez on Instagram. These are people who appear to be one gender or the other, but they have no interest in like changing their physicality. It's really interesting. So for me drag was the gateway or the portal for me to be able to recognize collect accept, and then reintegrate parts of myself that I had disowned and when I realized that, and I became conscious of the process that was going on there, I was just able to just accelerate the process and I ended up feeling so whole,

so whole, when I realized I could just be who I want to be but drag was definitely the midwife to a more fully realized version of myself. As far as who I am today like if you look at my profile default on Facebook that's not me in drag that's just me looking how I want to look. But there was a point in time where I never, never would have done that, and I walk out of the house looking like that. We have something called art walk here in Lafayette where downtown all the museums and local vendors and stuff put out their art and not even two years ago I remember almost having a panic attack over just wearing a flower crown down to art walk, and now, I have nails painted and long hair and am living for it. So, I'm going to end that answer right there.

Interviewer: The next question I have is who or what does influence your drag. You've answered with a bunch of things already but is there anything more you wanted to add to that?

Khatrina Jackson: I can make it a lot more concise. If I had to come up with three major influences: Janet Jackson who is the best female performer ever. We have my sister who I just love how she's just so herself. She is so herself and her essence is so strong. It's like who she is, is perfume or cologne whereas other people are the body sprays from Bath and Body Works, you know. Her essence is just so here, and I appreciate that. And then the third component was just me having that drive to explore, to become bigger in some sort of way because I didn't know what it would lead to, but I knew that it was the next necessary step. So, it was just me opening up to my development, me opening up to my destiny, me just following that inner urge to move in a particular direction that felt right even if it didn't make sense logically to me at the time.

Interviewer: Do you consider your drag to be political?

Khatrina Jackson: I do, but not in a way that most people imagine political things to be. I would say it's more like passively political in the sense that I am an openly gay black man living in south Louisiana. And I'm doing drag in a public space. How can that not be political? It is upsetting to people who have preconceived ideas of what a black man is supposed to be, what his responsibilities are, and what his limitations are as a result of that and I'm tearing that to shreds. So, people who are comfortable seeing black men one way inside the black community and outside the black community, it affects them, and it affects their perceptions and what they may or may not be comfortable with. So even though I may not be waving any flags, kissing any babies, or are making a very deliberate demonstration that's like orchestrated and I'm trying to spin the eye on this point or I'm trying to push this or push that, it's very political in the sense that I am existing in an unapologetic way, when a lot of people will say that I shouldn't.

Interviewer: That's definitely understandable. So, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Are you part of a drag family, house, or collective?

Khatrina Jackson: I have never been a part of a drag family. And the reason why is because my last name was very important to me. When you join a family you kind of adopt that name, and I didn't want that. I wanted my own identity and also, this is something else that I sensed, I didn't want to get sucked into the drag world and lose myself. I was in drag to find myself. And you see some of those people, how you can tell drag is becoming like, even though they, how can I even say it? I'll say it like this, it's as if their drag persona is consuming them, because when they're out of drag, they are pale, they don't have no eyebrows no more. Their earlobes are all scabbed

up from gluing earrings to them and then snatching them off. It's as if who they are is only there to support their drag identity. And I can't speak for them, but from the outside looking in and knowing what my journey is like, to me it seems like they're losing themselves whereas with me I feel like I'm finding myself. But, that's all I got to say about that.

Interviewer: You say that you go out and drag is more a part of you now, but how often do you perform, and where do you perform?

Khatrina Jackson: Oh my gosh. I keep telling myself and promising people that I'm going to perform, because people still remember and still love me as a performer. But at this point the only time I perform is pretty much annually whenever the UL drag show is happening again and they want guest performers or they want alumni I get preferential treatment because I used to be the president and I'm a former queen, so I'll get myself together, you know, for that. My most recent performance was at UL in Angelle Hall. I want to say it was in October, but I do not perform regularly anymore outside annually.

Interviewer: What goes into getting ready for a performance?

Khatrina Jackson: Really the hardest part for me, at this point, is creating original choreography because I don't consider myself to be a dancer the way that, I guess dancers, would consider themselves to be dancers or like people who are like oh that person can dance, you know. The good thing is that even though by the time I'm done it comes out looking so good. I have this one performance in mind that I did that is just my absolute favorite. I have to actually either write out all the lyrics or print them out and word for word and sometimes syllable by syllable, I'm actually writing down particular moves and choreography so it's very intricate very detailed sometimes pretty tedious but whenever I'm able to link movements to the words that I'm memorizing it makes it easier for me to remember the choreography. So that's the most involved part for me that I don't hear anybody else do or talk about but aside from that I suppose that one of the hardest things would be getting everything together in time because I seem to always wait to the last minute to order my stuff because usually I have such wide spaces between the last time and the next time I do drag and me thinking "Oh, well there isn't going to be another opportunity that comes up." I end up giving and donating a lot of my things to other queens who are up and coming. You know they're starting their drag journey and I want to help. And then I'm like oh well it looks like I'm about to perform after all, and I have to order thing all over again.

Interviewer: Would you consider getting ready for the performance the biggest challenge of doing drag and being a drag queen.

Khatrina Jackson: I would say yes, because even though it's always scary for me to be out there and perform. It happens like that it's over before I even know it. But the preparation, the more thorough my preparation and the better I feel about that, the less pressure and the less fear I feel about performing, and I actually get to enjoy the performance instead of hold my breath the entire way trying not to make any mistakes.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or the world?

Khatrina Jackson: One thing that I do find unique, that's really cool, is that one of the main drag performers, there is a trio here in Lafayette called the Ladies of Bolt. There is one that I went to school with. He was a member of GLASS when I was like president of it and everything. He graduated and got his degrees, working and all that type of stuff. But he's also turned drag into an entire career and it's rare that I hear that people are in the drag scene but also educated at the same time. In like an I got this degree on paper type of the education and I think it's cool that he has both. I think that's really neat.

Interviewer: How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Khatrina Jackson: I am still working that out because of recent developments, but this is what I know for sure. What I know for sure is that I consider myself to be a cisgender male but I think I count as nonbinary or gender fluid simply because of the way that I express myself visually.

Interviewer: Do you use different pronouns when you're in drag versus when you're out of drag?

Khatrina Jackson: When I'm in drag any pronoun works because some people get confused and I understand that you know I get that and it's kind of like how RuPaul would say "Call me he, she, Regis or Kathie Lee, as long as you call me," and I guess to update that for 2019 is like well, with me you can call me, this is when I'm in drag, he, she, Offset, or Cardi B as long as you call me. What I have noticed is that when I'm not in drag and I'm just living my day to day life, even when I'm made up, when people call me, she or when people call me girl, it bothers me. It really does bother me. I prefer to be called he, him, his, I prefer those pronouns. I don't know if there's a part of me that's still trying to hold on to the security that came with how I used to present and who I used to be or if that really is just a preference that I have regardless of how I look. If I'm not in drag, if I ain't got no titties or hips on, I'm a he. I'm just a very beautiful one. Like for example there are like guys who've wanted to meet me and all that type of stuff because they saw me online. And then I realized in the middle of communication that they believe that I'm a trans woman and I'm like I never thought in my entire life that I would be disappointing somebody by not being trans. And I'm not saying that being trans is a disappointment it's just that because of the mythology that's built around it and some of the negative characteristics that are unfairly placed on trans people like "Oh, you know, you're trying to pretend to be a woman you're out here tricking men," when that's not the case. What I'm saying builds off of that mythology which is; I'm over here doing the opposite. I'm hurting people's feelings because I'm not trans.

Interviewer: Would you say that drag has influenced your sex and gender identity?

Khatrina Jackson: That's a fair word, but there is a word that I like to use whereas the connotation is more accurate because influence, it has a really good denotation, but the connotation isn't right. So, I would say that drag has facilitated. It's helped facilitate the things that you've mentioned because it really was more of a process. And that's the connotation that I get with facilitation. Whereas when it comes to influence it feels like it's more of a here and there type of thing, it's an in and out type of thing. So, I would say that drag has facilitated my evolution as a person.

Interviewer: Do you think it has facilitated how you think about gender in general then?

Khatrina Jackson: Oh yes, of course, because being in drag and being around other people who do drag and consequently- Lord, I'm over here sounding like I don't have a degree. Consequently, being close to people who are also trans, you know, and what that does is that that causes me to have the opportunity to see and have conversations about gender and sex that I never would have before because back when I was first starting drag, all of this stuff about pronouns and the trans movement that's taking place, all that hadn't happened yet. The only way I would really know anything is by being around the people who actually lived that life and those who knew them. So, if I wasn't doing drag at that point in time, I would be so closed minded due to just the sheer ignorance that I had and the things that I just didn't even know existed, and the ways of life and ways of thinking that I didn't even know existed. I remember when there was a very famous drag performer who was also trans that lived here in Lafayette, she was locally famous I should say, I was talking to her and she had expressed that she was having some difficulties in her life and I knew that she was a trans woman and I told her in response, I was like, "But you're so pretty, you're so beautiful, you know, inferring that she looks like a "real woman." And the fact that she's beautiful should be enough to just cure anything that is bothering her in her life because she passes. And, I'm like, the fact that she didn't read me, was very gracious and understanding, she knew that I didn't know, because where I am now. Looking back on that I'm like "Oh my god." Drag gave me the opportunity to first start having interactions and conversations like that, where I could make my mistakes early, so that now I'm in a world that is more advanced and fast paced when it comes to trans rights and when it comes to trans people being people. they're people just like everybody else but with their own unique challenges which don't cancel each other out. The fact that I can look back and be like "I made that mistake and I had that perspective," and the fact that nobody jumped all over me, I was able to naturally develop into an ally and that's something else that's really important because, kind of like the black community, the trans community has experienced so so so much that any little amount of pain or slight can be so inflammatory, right? And it'll get to the point where they attack people who mean very well but they just don't know what to do or they don't know what better words to say, you know. And I know as ignorant as I admit that I was, if I would've been heavily reprimanded for my ignorance the way that people are now, I would have not become an ally, out of simple, just not wanting to, how can I say it, I would have just wanted to be contrarian because I'm like I'm over here trying to help you. Of course, I'm on my pedestal and on my high horse with this type of attitude, right? "I'm over here trying to help you and I don't have to, and you want to for come me and I'm trying to be an ally, fuck y'all." You know that's essentially how I would I felt and what I would have thought at that time. But since no one ever hit me with a heavy hand when it came to educating me and helping me understand, I'm able to not only be an ally but understand the thinking of people who aren't there yet and know how to reach out to them and know what not to do because you can turn a friend into an enemy because of how you correct them.

Interviewer: You said you're a cisgender male, so do you think that has influenced your drag at all?

Khatrina Jackson: I am gonna say no. And the reason why I say no- well it's a no and a yes. The reason why I'm saying no is because so many drag performers are cisgender males. It's kind of like, the standard, and for some people that's what makes drag, drag. That's why there's so much controversy around by bioqueens and stuff because it's like "If you ain't no cisgender male, if

there is no real transformation what's the point of us watching," right? So, I think no, it wasn't an influence because it's so normal, it's so standard, it's so regular. But then also yes, it's an influence just because of how that set things up for me to learn about myself later on. Cause if I wasn't cisgender male and I'm learning all of this stuff about gender and myself and the way that I express myself, I would have been in a different place, would've been in a different place. So, there are so many variables that it's difficult to predict how things would have turned out, but the most catch all, stable answer that I can say is, is that being a cisgender male who does drag is the standard. So it's kind of like "Does it influence the way that I do drag?" is almost like well does being white in America influence the way that- hell you- I can't even get at it because being white in America is so normal, it is so normal that there is a lot of things you don't have to think about. So being a cisgender male, in drag, in the drag world there's so much you don't have to think about because that's normal. Whereas if I were a transgender male maybe I would have some sort of complex about presenting as a female because I used to be one. And what's happening? Am I going backwards? Is my newfound manhood as far as it being presented on the outside going to be a challenge or compromise because I'm doing drag after I just transitioned? I don't have to deal with all of that.

Interviewer: Would you say that doing drag has impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Khatrina Jackson: It has impacted the awareness of my confidence because I didn't find that I was any more confident out of drag, but I did notice that I noticed that I wasn't more confident outside of drag, so it really helped when it came to my awareness.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time as Khatrina Jackson, what advice would Khatrina give to your younger self?

Khatrina Jackson: It would be, that it is ok for you to be the type of boy that you are. You don't have to divide yourself into pieces in order to feel normal, in order to feel accepted, in order to feel like there is a place for you in the world. Because quiet as it's kept, there isn't one. You're not supposed to be normal and there's not a path that you are gonna be walking on that's paved, well lit, with the map. You're here to create a blueprint. You're here to blaze a new trail, or to go through one that has been very, very lightly walked. Don't expect so many of the answers to come from other people. You're going to have to get a lot of those answers from yourself, and you're going to need as many pieces of yourself together at the same time to understand what it is that you truly feel and what it is that you truly think. The more well integrated and whole you become as a person, the less you need the outside voices to tell you what to do.

Interviewer: That's a really good thing to tell your younger self. How do you define drag?

Khatrina Jackson: I define drag- it's like I can get all textbook and dictionary.com but I think what would be a lot more valuable for you is if I just tell you what drag means for me. You can't get that online. So as far as what drag means for me, I would say that drag is the opportunity for me to become someone that otherwise I would not allow myself to become. Drag is the medium that allows me to access parts of myself that I forgot were even there. Drag is- how can I say it? Drag is the- it's like the pot it's the cauldron in which I'm able to throw all the pieces of myself

together and mix it up and see how it comes out. And then I get to decide to alter the recipe afterwards, but at least I get to try it first. Before drag, I didn't have the space I didn't have the container, I didn't have the appropriate boundaries that I could set up so that I can even pour myself into something so I could see how it would turn out. You know, so drag was that platform that allowed me to show up in a different way so I could see those other parts of myself and decide what to do from then on.

Interviewer: What do you think the purpose of drag is?

Khatrina Jackson: The purpose of drag for me, to revisit something that I said earlier, was to facilitate me becoming whole. Like it was to facilitate me integrating the parts of myself that I disowned and eventually forgot about. Cause for a long time, there was this sense about myself where I felt like I was kind of like the gum that had all of the flavor chewed out I was like there's something missing. Something isn't quite right. And it was because I went as far as I could go with the parts of myself that I was holding onto. Like, I needed all of me in order to be able to go further, in order to become stronger, in order to understand things better. I needed all those other parts of myself. And if it weren't for drag, I would not have had a means in which I could get in touch with those parts of myself that I forgot about and disowned. Which would be my feminine energy. Which would be- and feminine energy by the way is very magnetic. Like masculine energy is projective. You go out and get it when it comes to masculine energy. Whereas with feminine energy you draw things into you, you pool things in. It's more about receiving than it is about giving. So, when you look at masculine energy versus feminine energy, and I was using so much masculine energy in my life, and I didn't have too much of that feminine energy to balance it out, my life became very exhausting, because it was about ripping and running. It was about giving without receiving. It was about going out and getting, but not having very much come to me. Very, very, very exhausting. So, you know, when it comes to masculine and feminine principles, I say that because it's important to look past just boy or girl. No, like when it comes to the spiritual meanings behind masculine and feminine. That magnetic aspect of who I was, was split off, and it was unconscious and inaccessible to me until I started doing drag. So, it was big. Big, big stuff.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual?

Khatrina Jackson: Yes, but not in the way that people try to pigeonhole it to make it immoral. I think that drag is sexual because some people are sexual. The thing is that there's drag that is very funny. There is drag this very fashion-forward and edgy. There is drag that is very political. And then there is also drag that's sexual. And it's so interesting because sex is a part of so many other things, so many other things. But when it's like well "Is drag sex, is it sexy," you know? "Can the children come, and can drag queens read to children when they're nothing but walking sex?" It's not like- it doesn't have to be. It's an option, but it doesn't have to be. It's kind of like how boobs can be sexual, but it's also food. So, it's like yes, you know drag is sexual, but not all the time, and it doesn't have to be.

Interviewer: How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Khatrina Jackson: Oh, I love RuPaul's drag race. Even with all the criticism it gets, because I'm a real fan because I read the reddit. Even with all the valid critiques that the show gets, and even RuPaul himself gets, I still love RuPaul's Drag Race because what it's doing- even though some people were like "Oh it's making drag too mainstream blah blah blah." Well I look at it as; it is an international peephole where people can get exposed to drag queens and the people behind those drag personas to the point that is almost like exposure therapy. Part of the reason why people are so afraid of drag, and gay, and trans, and all that type of stuff is because they really don't know what the fuck they're talking about. They just know what people tell them, and those people who are telling them things don't know what they're talking about. So, the fact that RuPaul's drag race is a very open source, it is source material where people who would otherwise be lied to about people like us get to see us talk about ourselves is very valuable. So, I don't care what type of criticism RuPaul's Drag Race gets about being overly commercialized, or mainstream, or even manipulative when it comes to certain storylines about queens. At the end of the day it is giving us the opportunity to tell our own stories and be accepted by people on our terms but then also on the terms of the people understanding that's coming from an open place and an open mind, instead of just the rumors and the mysteries, and all that type of stuff. So that's how I feel about RuPaul's Drag Race.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be?

Khatrina Jackson: Oh God, if I could change one thing, I would remove the drugs. That is another thing that pushed me out of it, especially because I'm so straight laced. I can't stand drug culture, and because drag has so much space for people who are in pain because these are usually gay and trans people. People who are on the margins of society. People who are misunderstood. People who are a mystery, you know all that type of stuff. And when you are having that type of experience, when you don't have people, you don't have love, you turn to drugs. And since so much of the population that does drag are these types of people, the drugs have a, they have a place. They have a place and you're not gonna be forced, you don't have to do them, but it's accepted. It is tolerated, and I just wish it weren't present. But it's very similar to the music industry when it comes to the presence of drugs there because a lot of musicians are very sensitive people who have a difficult time handling life because on stage their life is wonderful. But off stage and behind the scenes, things are falling apart and the only way they manage it is via substances like that. It's very similar to people who are sensitive and very, very, hurt and having a difficult time managing life and the LGBT plus community. And I just wish that, even though we understand the pain, that we will be less tolerant of particular methods of managing that pain such as the drugs and alcohol.

Interviewer: What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag?

Khatrina Jackson: That drag is just all about sex. You know, that drag is just one big old- or, or, or that it doesn't have class to it because it can. Cause when people think of drag what they think about are men dressing in women's clothing because it turns them on- or at least the ignorant people. Or they think about "oh it's a man in a wig with smeared lipstick on. He's not taking this seriously," is so funny. Ho ho ho. Ha ha ha. He he he. Girl, drag is a sport. It's a performance art. It takes a

lot of talent, skill, dedication, and hours to hone that craft, because that's what it is, and as fun as it is, I also feel like it's something that's worth taking seriously because it does require dedication, and it does require a person's time and skill. So, when it comes to misconceptions, drag, here is one way I can put it in a nutshell. Drag is so much more than the least common denominator that ignorant people ascribe it to. It's more than the least common denominator. Just like any other activity, any other passion, is more than the worst aspects about it.

Interviewer: Where do you think these misconceptions come from?

Khatrina Jackson: These misconceptions come from people not having real conversations with the ones that they're talking about. Just like any other misconception, like you just take the words of other people, who aren't the people that you're talking about as true like how you just gonna believe what other people have to say about someone else. You know, when there is- let me, let me rephrase that because I'm human, like I understand why and how. I've done it I've been on all ends of it. It's just that it- the misconceptions come from people being too afraid to speak to the people who are doing or living exactly what it is that they want to know about. Like, if I wanted to know about what it's like to be a surgeon and what that life is like and what they think and what they feel and what they go through, I'm not about to go and ask NeNe Leakes. I'm sure she has plenty to say about it. I'm sure she has an opinion. She'd be very vocal about it but she's not that, so why am I going to ask her? But when it comes to drag, when it comes to the gay community, when it comes to trans people, a lot of people go and ask NeNe Leakes, if we're going to continue with that metaphor. As opposed to actually going and asking them. They'll ask people who are very vocal, boisterous, and loud and opinionated, and they take that confidence and that sincerity as its credibility when it is not. It's just confidence and sincerity. Just because you're confident and just because you're sincere about what you say and what you do, it doesn't mean it is correct. It just means that you mean it.

Interviewer: If you chose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Khatrina Jackson: It would be the process. The process that it takes to get to that polished look. The process that it takes to achieve the transformation. Now, between when I first got started and now, the window has gotten much larger as far as seeing what that looks like. But, just the time, the work, the skill, and the talent it takes to take let's say a cisgender male into a, hell, even passable cisgender looking woman. Like it's amazing the talent that it takes. And it's also not just amazing in the sense of wow. It's intellectually stimulating because of the strategy it takes to be able to do that.

Interviewer: That concludes the interview, thank you so much for participating.

Interview with Kyra Banks

To cite this interview please use the following:

Huster, Samantha. 2020. Interview with Kyra Banks. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 7, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/kyra-banks/>

Interviewer: Hopefully, it picks everything up. Um...So I guess, First and foremost, I just want to remind you that if there is anything I ask that you're not comfortable answering all you have to do is tell me and we'll move on.

Kyra Banks: Okay.

Interviewer: No big deal. Okay. So, first question. Um...When did you hear about drag and what was your initial reaction?

Kyra Banks: Um I think my first experience with drag would be in college. I was actually seeing a drag queen. I went to a really conservative Christian school in Oklahoma. And I had some friends that went to a less conservative Oklahoma school. And there was this underage club that everyone went to and they dragged me there and I was terrified. That was when I first saw a drag queen and I had probably seen it before, in like a movie or something, like traditional Hollywood stuff. But I didn't realize "Oh this is a thing."

Interviewer: That "yeah people do this?"

Kyra Banks: Yeah

Interviewer: What was the college? Can I ask?

Kyra Banks: Southern Nazarene University.

Interviewer: Nice. Okay. Alright. So, your reaction was really positive?

Kyra Banks: Yeah. I mean, it was...I was very entertained. And I did a lot of musical theater and stuff in college and in high school so, I thought of it like that. That was my initial kind of thought process.

Interviewer: Cool. So, when did you start performing?

Kyra Banks: I can't remember the year, but it's been almost 10 years ago.

Interviewer: Jeez.

Kyra Banks: Yeah, so I've been doing it for like 10 years. Yeah. I started...it was during the holiday season, like December. Most people start on Halloween because it's like "Oh."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Kyra Banks: I remember December is when I first did it. And that was just sporadically for a little bit. Then it really started amping up.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what pushed you to start doing it? Like what made that connection for you?

Kyra Banks: I had a lot—I made a lot of friends that did drag. And I also worked with a lot of drag queens...at Olive Garden. [chuckles]

Interviewer: [laughs] At “The Garden”?

Kyra Banks: Yeah. And so, I was just like “I want to try.” And...yeah, started from there.

Interviewer: What was the first experience like for you? How did you feel doing it the first time?

Kyra Banks: It felt really good. I’d been on a stage before. Like that part wasn’t that crazy. I remember I had a—I remember the first song I did was L-O-V-E by Ashlee Simpson.

Interviewer: [chuckles] Nice.

Kyra Banks: That was the first song I ever did. It was kind of nerve-wracking because you have like the heels and...I was taught really well. Like, I had a friend of mine--I went to her house. It was during PRIDE and they were like “Okay, this is how you walk in heels.” And like, we put on heels, and I remember walking back and forth in the house I lived at. [laughs] They were like “No, that’s not right, that’s not right.”

Interviewer: [laughs] Like a little training session?

Kyra Banks: Yeah. And then like, the trick is to vacuum your house in heels.

Interviewer: Really?

Kyra Banks: Yeah. That’s how they teach you because you walk back and forth.

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess that makes sense. Good to know. Um, so how did like your family, friends, and people close to you react when you told them, “hey, I’m doing drag now.” Like what was that like?

Kyra Banks: Um, my...some of my family knows and some of my family doesn’t.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kyra Banks: Um...my brother and sister, which are my only two siblings, they’ve both been to a drag show before, of mine. My parents don’t know, as far as I know. They probably have an idea, because they’ve been to my house and it’s like “Oh, that room is for storage!” [chuckles] because there’s, you know, drag everywhere.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm

Kyra Banks: Um...and I have some cousins down in New Orleans that have been to a show. So, there are some that know and some that don’t. Friends, like everybody knows. Like, people call me Kyra all the time. And I’ll answer to that sometimes before I answer to Andy. Like what? Who?

Interviewer: Okay, so mixed kind of reactions?

Kyra Banks: Yeah, mixed. But all very positive. Like, never like, my brother's a musical theater major and he's actually had roles where he had to dress in drag and, you know.

Interviewer: Did he come to you? Like please teach me?

Kyra Banks: No, he didn't. Because it's very different. Their make-up and stuff is very different. They're not trying to look real, you know?

Interviewer: That's fair. So where did your drag name come from? How did you get there?

Kyra Banks: Okay so...the first drag name I had was Kyra Carmichael because the first person to ever put me in drag, their last name was Carmichael.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kyra Banks: And I liked the alliteration of it. But then, I started to kind of out-grow that. And I was like I kind of what my own identity. So, I—it was one of the first pageants I ever competed in, I changed my name to Kyra Banks because I liked America's Next Top Model, Tyra Banks. I was like, well I'll be Kyra Banks. So that's how that came about.

Interviewer: Cool. Um...this is going to be a long question. So, there are a lot of terms for like different types and styles of drag. So, like what—do you use any labels or are there any labels that you feel like really apply to the type of drag that you do?

Kyra Banks: Are you talking about more like pronouns or descripting...?

Interviewer: Like description. Like there are camp queens, fish queens, and things like that.

Kyra Banks: Okay. I kind of feel—I mean I love doing comedy. I talk a lot on the microphone. I really enjoy that part of it. And people have always been like, “Oh, you should do stand-up comedy.” And I have a show here (Four Strings—a bar in Soular, MO) on Thursdays that I do a lot talking-wise. Just to engage the audience. But I've done a lot of pageants. I don't mind being funny. I think it's good to be well-rounded. Especially now, because you have so much drag. Really, it's kind of, like, crazy. When I first started and what I was aware of to now, where we have so many different aspects of it. Which is a really good thing, I think. But—I also don't feel like—you shouldn't ever, for me, personally, I don't ever want to fit into like one. I'll try anything! I'm not scared to be ugly. Like, the last show I had here, I did “white trash” with like crazy make-up and just had fun with it. So, I think that's, for me, I just want to be able to have with it. And apply certain things when you need to. Like if you're going to be in a pageant, you need to look a certain way and do that stuff. But day-to-day stuff I'm not scared to take a risk and do something different.

Interviewer: So, do you think that like versatility, do you think that helps you as a drag artist?

Kyra Banks: That's huge! I mean, I was always taught—and I grew up around older drag queens in Oklahoma, and they've had careers of like 20 plus years—and their biggest thing is that you always have to—don't be afraid to change. Because if you can't change, they'll leave you

behind. You might get out every once in a while, and people'll go, "That's old school drag, I love that." But if you can't keep up with other stuff, then your career's not going to last as long. Because everything is always changing, so you can't be stagnant.

Interviewer: Absolutely. So, um...you kind of talked about your musical theater background, but who or what do you think has influenced your drag the most?

Kyra Banks: I think the most has been other queens around me. [long pause] Excuse me; If you're talking about pop culture, I would say I kind of model after like Christina Aguilera. I always call my drag like a cross Real Housewives and like a pop star kind of thing. Like an Erika Jayne kind of character.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kyra Banks: Sometimes. It can be different. But to me, that's the look I like, as far as like, aesthetically, to me. How I put stuff together. Like glitzy, glamour but also like I can just wear regular clothes.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you consider your drag to be political in any way?

Kyra Banks: Have I said political things? Yes. But do I consider my drag political? No.

Interviewer: Okay

Kyra Banks: Like I could say something on the microphone like—I had an ongoing bit before Trump got elected about, you know, making fun about that, and all that kind of stuff. And still, that slips in, but...as far as being a political activist—and I was a political science major in college, so I understand all of it. I just don't think what I do and where I perform, you don't go there to see a show for that. I'm all for that, if that's what—I'm not opposed to it. I just don't think my drag is political.

Interviewer: Gotcha. Do you think drag itself is sort of political?

Kyra Banks: Yes! Because it's kind of—it bends the norm a little bit. And I think, a lot of times, you get audiences in here, and different venues especially in St. Louis, and further south that get exposed to it, especially now that they're watching it on television "Oh, there's a drag show here." When you put it in someone's face and it's like, "these are real people, too." I think, inherently, it is political for some people and, of course, you have the Stonewall Riots and stuff that were started by drag queens. It is, in some ways, very political.

Interviewer: Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Like, are you part of a drag family or a collective of sorts?

Kyra Banks: I never really had like a drag family. I never—I've had people that have helped me along the way and people that I consider friends. I still have that now, like I have people I'm very close to. Like if we need to get stuff together, we can do that. But I've never had a drag family, where I share like a last name. I tried to have a drag kid. I'm not good at it. They're too needy! I'm like, no, I can't. Figure it out! So, a lot of it was like a trial and error for me. I did date another drag queen for a period of time.

Interviewer: How was that?

Kyra Banks: That was...interesting. You know—it was good, in a sense, where you could kind of bounce off each other. It wasn't a great relationship, but I learned a lot.

Interviewer: It was good for your drag performance

Kyra Banks: Right. What was the other part? Day-to-day?

Interviewer: Yeah, so. How often do you perform?

Kyra Banks: I perform at least once every weekend. I perform every Saturday. So, my day on that day is, I work—I work from home, which is good, so—but I work until 7 and I get off the phone, and I shower and start putting make-up on. So, it's like from 10--9:30 that morning 'til about 12:30 at night. I—always people are like “Oh, I'm so tired,” and I'm like “Oh, please. Do not tell me about being tired.” But then, there could be weeks when I'm doing drag Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. Like 5 days in a row. So, it varies, but at least once a week. Most of the time, 2 days a week—Friday and Saturday. It's just go, go, go. Like there's never a, um, there are days off, but it's like on that day you're like “Oh my god, I just want to sit and do nothing.”

Interviewer: So, what goes in to getting ready for a performance? Like take me through that process.

Kyra Banks: Well, first you have to shave. Or, I do. And then, it takes me about an hour to an hour and a half to do my make-up—or to be completely ready: make-up, lashes, body—there's a body suit with like, fake hips, fake tits, cinchers. Everybody's like “your body is so amazing” and I'm like “it's all fake.” All of it's fake. You, too, could look just like this! Um, and then, so a typical process is like two hours for a complete, ready to go on stage. Girls are always like, “Oh, your make-up is so pretty” and it's a lot of make-up. Trust.

Interviewer: What's the hardest part of that routine do you think?

Kyra Banks: Oh, putting pads on. I hate it. It's the worst part. I hate it! If I didn't have to do it, I would love to not have to do it. I wear like 5 pairs of tights, so you're cinched up and then you put other stuff, and then you have to shove these [pads] down your tights and then you put more tights on.

Interviewer: Yikes. Okay. Is there anything unique to St. Louis drag compared to like other cities, if you've ever done drag anywhere else? Do you think it's really different here or do you think it's pretty similar?

Kyra Banks: I think the drag community in St. Louis is very diverse. From where I've worked at before, and I think that's also kind of the trend elsewhere as well. But when I first moved here about 5 years ago, it was already more kind of progressive in that diversity. We have a lot of different types of performers. Like I grew up in Texas. So, the drag that I saw there and in Oklahoma is what I would say old-school drag: big hair, jewelry, all that kind of stuff. Which I love! And still love to watch. If it's really good. And so, I think St. Louis is unique in that aspect that you have as much diversity--you have a very wide spectrum, you can see pretty much anything you want. If you want to see like club kid, we have that. If you wanna see like gender-bender or whatever,

we have that. We have a lot of diversity. So, I mean, that's important. That's kind of unique for here.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Um...so how do you identify in terms of your sex, your gender identity, or any other way you wish you could identify?

Kyra Banks: I identify as a cis male. I--you know. I've never once. People ask me this a lot, "do you want to be a girl?" and I'm like "I never had any desire to do that." Do I have friends that have transitioned? Yes. And if that's what makes them happy then that's great. I never had that kind of feeling. I like to feel like a woman when I'm in drag. I like to take it all off to and feel like Andy. You know?

Interviewer: Yeah. Ok. So, do your pronouns change in and out of drag? You mentioned that you respond--

Kyra Banks: No! I don't really care. And I don't know...I know some people do and that's important for them. And I respect that, but for me, you could call me Kyra, or you could call me Andy, you could call me whatever you want. My group of friends will call each other girl all the time, and you know, stuff like that. It's never really been a part of something that I really have been concerned about. So, it's always pretty fluid for me. Just, whatever you want to call me.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think drag has like influenced your perception of sex and gender? Or did you sort of always see it the way you see it now?

Kyra Banks: I think it's made me more exposed to it. As far as knowing a lot of people that have either like transitioned or they have used different pronouns. I've been exposed to that a lot more doing drag than I think you would be if you didn't do drag. So, I think that aspect of it, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Um...let's see. I have to make sure I get all our mandatory questions. [laughter] So how has drag like impacted you, like in your personal development?

Kyra Banks: For me, I think it's affected my life in a really positive way. Like I've had a lot of exposure as far as...being able to experience a lot of things that I would not have been able to experience if I had not done drag. Like, I've, you know, been a part of 2 music videos, like not anything crazy. They're on YouTube, but like...it's not...I got to experience something like that. Just been exposed to a lot more things and had opportunities that I wouldn't have had if I had not done drag. And also, the friendships that I've gained, like artistically. It provided an outlet for something that I had gotten while doing musical theater. It allowed me by doing drag to kind of get that back on stage feeling, which I didn't have those opportunities at the time when I started doing drag. It's also made me poor sometimes. [laughter] Just the opportunities that I've gained, the friendships that I've gained, the skills that I've developed. Like you develop a lot of skills. Like I can make clothes now, and I wouldn't have ever started to sew if I didn't do drag. You know, so now I have a different skill set that I wouldn't have had before.

Interviewer: Okay. Um...So do you think drag has like impacted your confidence when you're outside of drag? Like has it made you more confident?

Kyra Banks: No, I think...I think I'm pretty much the same. Excuse me [clears throat]. Pretty much the same. I've always been...they called our family in church the loud family. So, we've always been very out-there, life of the party people anyways. So I don't think I've had a big personality shift between Andy and Kyra, the only difference I think is...for instance if I'm not having such a great day and I have a show that night, I know I have to turn it on.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Kyra Banks: Like you don't get the option of "Okay, I get to be the same person." You do have to kind of switch. So, I do do that sometimes. But as far as...do I think it changes who I am, my persona? No. I don't...yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So... if you could go back in time to your younger self as Kyra, like in full drag, what do you would tell small [name redacted]? What advice would you give small [name redacted]?

Kyra Banks: Like, how small? Like little kid?

Interviewer: As young as you want to be.

Kyra Banks: I don't know. I would say...always listen to your heart, first of all. I did a lot of things because I thought that's what you were supposed to do or because people told me to do this or to do that. And... I would also say that--surround yourself with positive people that are going to support you. Because that's really important and you're going to need those kinds of people in your life at some point. That's what I would say.

Interviewer: Okay. Good advice.

Kyra Banks: And don't wear black lip liner! [laughter] That's never a good thing.

Interviewer: All good tips. All good tips. So... I'm kind of interested how your other social identities have impacted drag. Like the intersections between race and class and sexual orientation. So, what do you think about that? Do you think that you being white and being male, do you think that that has impacted your acceptance in drag or the way you do drag? Or anything like that?

Kyra Banks: I don't--I don't know. Growing up as a white, gay male in Texas is pretty like...I know it's different for everybody. We all different experiences and hardships. I've definitely learned a lot about other people's struggles. You know, like coming-out for me was not a pleasant experience. It's a lot better now, but that took a lot of time for that to be more accepted from my family and my parents. I think as far as...what do you mean as far as...

Interviewer: I mean--so in our class we've talked a lot about like the perceptions of like black queens and Hispanic queens as compared to like White and Asian queens...do you think that makes a difference in terms of St. Louis drag or any other drag shows? Do you see more tips coming in for any of the white artists as compared to people of color?

Kyra Banks: For me, I think it depends on your audience really. We have a pretty... growing up in Texas and Oklahoma, especially in Texas, some of the most talented queens there are the black and the Hispanic queens. And they will tear the house the down. They are lovely, gorgeous, and amazing not that there aren't talented white performers there, too, because there are. Here... I think it

depends on your audience. For me, I'm typical white girl in drag, really, I am. I'll ask, "what song do you want to hear?" and people will be like "Beyoncé!" and I'm like "No, I can't do that." I know one Beyoncé song...well I know more, but I can perform one.

Interviewer: What's the one?

Kyra Banks: Love on Top. That's about it. Or a ballad. Slow it down. So, I think it depends on your audience here because it's all about what they enjoy. So as far as the money that you make from the audience, you have to think about your demographics. Is this a younger crowd or is this an older crowd? What kind of music do they like? And you kind of cater to that. And each bar kind of is different, too, depending on the crowd they get there. For me, I don't think race has a lot to do with how successful you are. I think what you put into it determines how successful you're going to be. Not saying that's the case everywhere because there probably are some hurdles like...I know like I've seen stuff here. Some people are worried about...because it's the all-white cast. I see how that looks. And it's not because, as far as the shows I've been a part of that are the all-white cast, not because we have anything against a black performer or a Hispanic performer but because there's not that many of them here. And if they're booked elsewhere...you know. It does play into it some, but I don't think a lot of it's intentional. I think it's more about, your success comes from how much you put into it.

Interviewer: So, do you think class would have anything to do with that? You mentioned earlier that at times drag has been really expensive, it can drain you.

Kyra Banks: I think it can. I mean, there are certain, like, shows that have certain standards of what they want to put on-stage because they're paying you. I mean it is a business, you are a lot of times providing...it's a business because you are working for a bar and then they're trying to make money like you're trying to make money. There does come...like a certain aesthetic to it. And trust, like drag can be done on a budget. It can be. I do think that...it can play into it because some people may not be able to afford this X, Y, and Z to look just like that. But there are things that can be done and people that will help you...yeah, that could play into it, I think, if you don't have certain things because you can't afford it. I don't think that should, by any means, discourage you from doing what you want to do. But it can affect the ability to make it more like a career rather than just a hobby.

Interviewer: Do you view, like you doing drag, as more of a career or do you feel like it's more of a hobby? Or like a part-time job I guess would be the...

Kyra Banks: It's like a part-time job, because I have like a full-time job. But there have been times where drag was a full-time job. That was how I was making money. Times where I didn't have a job and I was doing drag to pay bills. So, it can be a full-time job and I know people that it is their full-time job. So, it can be...for me, it's more of like a part-time job. And it does feel like a job sometimes, definitely not a hobby sometimes. Because you're like "I don't want to do this, like this is not what I want to do."

Interviewer: How would you define drag? Just as a concept or an activity.

Kyra Banks: I think... I think first of all it's kind of an illusion. You're creating something that's not your norm. I definitely think it's art. I always kind of describe drag as like an artist that's going to paint on a canvas. It all starts as blank and then what you put on it makes it what it is. So, I do think it's an art form for sure. But...in most cases, it's an illusion. You're presenting something on stage that in some way is not reality...most of the time. It could make a play on reality, but it's not real. It's a character for me. That could take shape in many different forms. I don't think it has to be a certain...there's not a certain thing where it's like "This is what drag is." Because I've seen a lot of different types of it. So, I don't think...for me it's an illusion. It's something you create.

Interviewer: Um, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Kyra Banks: For me, it's an artistic release. I think it can be different for everybody. For me, it's an artistic release. It's like...a chance to become in sense like a celebrity in your own way. Some people use it for different reasons. But for me it's that kind of escape from reality. It's fun. It kinda becomes like...there are several people that have seen me out of drag and not realized who I was and then when it clicks, they're like "Oh my god!" And that's always an exciting moment for me because that means I did my job because you had no idea who I was. But now you put the pieces together.

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely. Um...do you think drag is sexual in nature?

Kyra Banks: For me, no.

Interviewer: For you, no?

Kyra Banks: But it can be for some people. I've heard stories.

Interviewer: We have talked a lot in class about how there are some shows where drag queens will pull an audience member on stage and then it sort of becomes like, a lap dance. I think a lot of people in our class think that's...

Kyra Banks: The norm?

Interviewer: Yeah, like that's drag.

Kyra Banks: No. I think you do a lot of flirt--like I do a lot flirting in drag. I've definitely like sat on a man's lap before for a dollar but...[laughter]. Uh...it's mostly like straight men that are super creeped out and you just want to be like "It's okay. We're not going to hurt you." Like...calm down. It's usually encouraged by everyone around them. For me, no. It's not ever been sexual in nature. It's really a....the underpinnings of it all is not a comfortable situation. You know? It's like everything is bound up and tucked away so it's not...something that's pleasing...in that physical sense, you know.

Interviewer: How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Kyra Banks: I, personally, love it. I watch it. I've known a lot of queens that have been on there.

Interviewer: Can I ask who? Which queens do you know?

Kyra Banks: Alyssa Edwards, I know her really well, from Texas. I've met quite a few of them. Like Jujubee, I love her. Asia O'Hara. She's a former Miss Gay America, so when I was competing here, we met her, and I knew her from Texas as well. She used to date one of my friends, so that...I knew her when she was working in a fabric store, not on RuPaul's Drag Race. Who else have I...? [long pause] Those would probably be the main ones that I know more than meeting them or working with them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Kyra Banks: But I love it! I think it's great that there is exposure to the drag community. I think people tend to forget that it's still a television show. So, it's not...it's not really what happens. And I think sometimes people get a misconception about what drag is sometimes. And I feel like...I would love to be on the show. I've never auditioned. I always say I'm going to but I always...I know I'll be the villain. Because I'll be the one going "I don't like that. Horrible" [laughter]. And then they'll love it on the runway, and I'll be like "That's retarded." That'd be me. I'd be that queen.

Interviewer: You'd be that one?

Kyra Banks: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, we're watching Season 9, right now in class.

Kyra Banks: Oh, you are?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Kyra Banks: That's fun.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's a really fun time. Um...and we've talked a lot about how RuPaul has come out to say that there aren't any drag kings on the show and that there will never be any drag kings on the show. Do you think that there should be drag kings or do you think it should stay just drag queens because that's what RuPaul does?

Kyra Banks: I think--and I know a lot of really good drag kings. I... they used to have like the national drag king pageant in Oklahoma City, so I used to go every year. So, I've been exposed to it and I've seen a lot of really good drag kings. But I do feel like RuPaul's Drag Race should stay just drag queens. I think what they do is similar but it's still different. And I think, in a competition like that, I just don't know how the dynamics of it all would work out. Would I be opposed to them having their own show? I think that'd be great. And it could be even a spin-off in that sense. I just don't know that...what RuPaul is trying to create in that universe of hers and that show...not that...I just don't think it would work. Not anything against drag kings of course, but I just don't think it would work. The dynamics would be off. Uh... so that's personally, yeah. Because you get like challenges and how would that translate for them? How would judge that? So, without being unfair to one group or the other. I think you would just change the whole dynamic of the show.

Interviewer: So, like...uh...

Kyra Banks: What do you think?

Interviewer: Um... you know, I... similar things. We've talked a lot about how the challenges would have to be altered if we're going to have them on the same show. Because you need to have things where they can be judged similarly. Because it is very difficult for you to look at a drag king and drag queen and go "Oh yeah, they were both really good on the same scale."

Kyra Banks: Right?

Interviewer: Especially with like Michelle Visage. She's very obsessed with padding and a silhouette.

Kyra Banks: Shape.

Interviewer: Yeah. I mean, how are you going to judge how a drag queen pads versus how a drag king pads?

Kyra Banks: And then like, are you going to ask a drag king to be a female character in the acting challenges. It, therefore, requires less effort for them. Or like when they have to put drag make-up on in 10 minutes, like...do they have an advantage there? It would just change everything.

Interviewer: Yeah. It would definitely be a very different challenge set that they would have to do. So, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, drag community, what would it be and why? Like if you could change anything about it?

Kyra Banks: I think, overall, I think if we could all be a little more accepting of what other people do. I may not like it, I may think it's horrible, but if that's what you want to do if that's your persona--your character--your whatever you want to call it and it works for you. Then great. And I think we also--on the flip side of that--if you want it to be a business, you have to realize that you're not going to be liked by everyone. And I think, sometimes, people get a little butt-hurt by that. And you have to just realize that not everyone is going to like me, and I'm okay with that. So, I think, two side to that. Be more accepting but also realize not everyone is going to accept you. Like we get caught up in that a lot, like "blah."

Interviewer: So, be more accepting and have a thicker skin?

Kyra Banks: Yeah. Because it's not easy like you're exposed. You're on-stage. You're going to hear people talk about you and you have to be able to be like "Okay, that's fine."

Interviewer: What do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag? What have you heard that you're like "absolutely not"?

Kyra Banks: Uh...that we all want to be like females all the time. That's not true. Or flip, that they [drag kings] all want to be males. Um...what else? Oh, we all do like death drops and splits all the time. Like, I don't know how to do that. I've never attempted it, probably never will. Not every drag queen is a dancing queen. Because you get a lot of that here. That's not what we always do. We do have that, but that's not everything. Uh, just because you're a pageant queen doesn't mean you're not versatile. And you can't do different things. Pageant queen is not a bad term. That's always the drag response, "Oh, you're a *pageant* queen." Yes! I am! That just means I'm polished and my clothes look nice.

Interviewer: So then, similarly, if you could choose one thing for people to know or learn about drag, like what do you think that would be? It doesn't have to be just like one point, it could be like an entire area of drag that you think people should learn about.

Kyra Banks: I think people forget that we're still human beings afterward. That we also have lives outside of this. I know, you know, drag performers with kids and a family. We are still people behind the make-up of it all or whatever you're presenting on stage. We all have lives outside of that that we deal with. Whether it be a job, or family members, or whatever. It's not...what we present on stage, there's so much more behind it, that goes into it that you don't realize. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, I know I have demographic information to ask you.

Kyra Banks: Okay.

Interviewer: Just so we can categorize it. How old are you?

Kyra Banks: 33.

Interviewer: 33. Uh...what would you categorize your race and ethnicity to be?

Kyra Banks: White.

Interviewer: And then sexual orientation? If you would like to share it.

Kyra Banks: Gay. Gold Star Gay.

Interviewer: Very, very important to know. [laughter] Okay.

Interview with Lady Luscious

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Walker, Seth. 2020. Interview with Lady Luscious. *Sociology of Drag*, SIUE, April 15, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/lady-luscious/>

Interviewer: So, to start, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Lady Luscious: When I first heard about drag is about when, I was probably about 21, and I started going to gay clubs in Iowa, and I saw a drag queen and like I didn't know before then, you know, straight out of high school in a small town, didn't know nothing about gay culture, nothing. So, I'm like why are they cheering this person on and like why does she look famous? And she was someone who was pretty big in the drag community as well. She was hilarious, and then someone explained to me she was a drag queen and then had to explain, you know, it's a man dressed as a woman at that time, you know, cause now drag is forming into something huge. So back then, it was just men dressing up as women to portray drag. So, that got me curious, I wasn't quite interested in it back then. It was just kind of like "Oh!" but then I loved watching it. I loved doing it or not doing it, just watching and going. So that was about the first time I ever saw when I was 21 so around 2003? Or 2002, something like that.

Interviewer: So, what are you now, 34ish?

Lady Luscious: I'm 36.

Interviewer: When did you start performing as a drag artist and why?

Lady Luscious: I started performing about, let's see, I've been here twelve years so twelve years ago. A friend of mine, well, Travis my husband, his friend he went to school with at the time in Cahokia, they kind of got back together and he kind of reintroduced me into drag because he was actually doing drag. So, we watched him a few times, we went to Grey Fox it was at the time... or was... still is. Went to Grey Fox to watch him a few times and he was like "Hey do you want to do drag?" and I'm like "I don't know." and she was like "Bitch you doing drag." so, thanks to... I was able to do my first drag about twelve years ago and it was at the Grey Fox and we thought we looked hot as shit and at that time and looking at the pictures now your like "Oh my god we look like uhhhh."

Interviewer: But that like all the upcoming tea... it's a whole story.

Lady Luscious: Yea because everyone thinks they're, when they first start, they're like no one can tell you anything, you know you think you're hot. You know it all. And like when you start doing it more and you start looking back, you're like "Oh my god girl."

Interviewer: And then why did you start performing?

Lady Luscious: Ever since I was little, I was always fem. I always like wearing my aunt's high heels and my mom's makeup and stuff like that, so it was kind of already there a little bit and experimenting in women's stuff and I also loved to dance. So, when I saw that, when I was twenty-one, I saw what they do they actually do makeup, heels, and all that stuff. And they dance that was kind of up my alley, so it wasn't really making me do it, it was a little twisting of my arm just a little bit.

Interviewer: Definitely a change.

Lady Luscious: It was just something that kind of reflected who I was deep inside. It's kind of, that was kind of why I decided to do drag.

Interviewer: How did your family, friends, and all them receive you being a drag artist?

Lady Luscious: So, of course my friends were more acceptable. Totally right off the bat, all my friends. My friends are my second family, my actual family, they are my family. It's a little difficult when you come out gay. I came out gay before I came out as a drag queen of course... sometimes it's the opposite. So, I already had that disconnect from some family members just for being gay so at that point it was like whatever it doesn't matter if they accept me or not so a lot of them still didn't, they didn't really know probably until a few years back. But like my immediate family like my mom and my brothers... my mom just told me that I make an ugly girl. That's just what her response was. But it was her way, I think, saying I disapprove in a way. She didn't really like it. My brothers, we're Native American it's a different culture so when they say "ehhhhhh" you know that means it's their shock, but it's not like... it wasn't a huge deal to them I think they accepted it. Because, actually, this is actually a famous person from my tribe back in the day she was trans I do believe. So, she was a man that wanted to be a woman and did women things, cooked and cleaned. This is way back when. If you look her up, she pops up. All the drag queens were posting things on Facebook about her. And I'm like "Oh my god! that's my culture! That's cool!" so when my brothers found out, they were shocked, but it wasn't like a culture shock because they were already aware of other people doing it, and I'm talking about back in the 1800s is when that person became what she was. And she was considered part of the god of love, everyone kind of respected her, you know in that aspect and you're not supposed to make fun of gay people because of that. So, my mom was more shocked, she really didn't accept me at that time. Just told me I was ugly. My brothers were shocked but they kind of already understood...

Interviewer: And accepted it to a point, yeah, I like that. So, Miss Lady Luscious Diva, where does your name come from?

Lady Luscious: So, when I started twelve years ago. Well, in high school no one could pronounce my last name which was Lementino so they just called me Lemons. My first drag name twelve years ago was Luscious Lemons because I thought I was Luscious, and no one could spell my last name, so I was like Lemons. so then, I was Luscious Lemons, and I would like throw lemon heads out and stuff like that. Just for fun. And then I kind of got out of drag a little bit and just to focus on my career and then I became an adult and I felt more like a lady. So, I was like "Well Luscious Lemons, its cute, but I feel like I'm grown now. I feel like an adult so what could I be like let me change my drag name, my persona, who I am, and I thought of it and I was like well

why don't I just be the lady, and I'll be Lady Luscious and that's where Lady Luscious came from. My Facebook is Miss Lady Luscious Diva that's because for some reason Facebook won't let me use Lady Luscious but first name lady as a first name. So, I had to come up with a thing but a lot of people, I wouldn't care if someone's like "Miss Lady Luscious Diva" like that totally doesn't bother me. And when I go perform sometimes that's what they say. "Miss lady Luscious Diva!" I don't care, it doesn't bother me.

Interviewer: If anything, it adds a little bit more character.

Lady Luscious: Character! Exactly.

Interviewer: So, there are a lot of terms or types of styles of drag from drag queen to drag kings to glamour queens, male impersonators, comedy queens, there's a lot of them amongst others, are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Lady Luscious: I don't know how, Miss Lady Luscious Diva is kind of slutty. She is a lady, but she is a little slutty. She likes to show a lot of her skin and a lot of her boobage. So, I mean, I think she's a little slutty. I'm a slutty drag queen! That's all I got to say!

Interviewer: We actually bring that up a lot in class, how sexualized is drag? What's the point of drag to where it cuts off in the end quote unquote, trans and living like that to the performance aspect of drag and doing all that. It's so in depth.

Lady Luscious: I was going to say that's way past, I don't know, but I can't do anything sexual in drag for me because I don't want to be a woman, you know what I mean? I like me being a male, but I like dressing up as a woman. All of those fabulous things that women have that's what I like. But I like being a man too.

Interviewer: So best of both worlds.

Lady Luscious: Yea, exactly!

Interviewer: Well that answers my question what type of drag you do. And then what's your style of drag: Slutty. I like that. And then, does the type of drag you do affect your life as a drag artist? Because I usually see that you're headlining stuff. You're usually on stage speaking, calling out people, and stuff like that when I see your stuff on Facebook and Instagram and stuff like that.

Lady Luscious: No, I mean if anything it just adds more to my life. Because like I said all my friends are my family, so when you become a drag queen you get to meet new people and I think it adds more to you. I don't think it necessarily does anything to my life? I just think that it adds more, you know kind of like getting a raise. It doesn't do anything with your lifestyle it makes it better. So that's kind of how I look at it.

Interviewer: And then I know we go to Attitudes a lot me and my friends because we're good enough now and that's just right there. Those shows are pretty good. Have you ever performed at Attitudes?

Lady Luscious: That's kind of where I started out with... so twelve years ago I started drag and I just felt like... I don't know what I felt? Like in drag. I don't know if I was like "well, I'm not a drag

queen. I don't know if I'm bitchy enough." I just didn't know if it was me, I guess. So, I took a break and then I was really craving it. Like I'm like I want to go back on stage like this is me. I felt myself again and then... opened her show at Attitudes called the Kitty Show. So, it was amateur drag nights on Wednesday nights. So, I started off there about six years ago now? Five or six years ago. So that's when I restarted my drag again and that's where it started was Attitudes.

Interviewer: Who or what has influenced your drag? If anything.

Lady Luscious: I meant most definitely Mariah Carey was my ultimate diva. And Gloria Estefan and Selena and all them. A lot of pop culture really played in my drag because when I was growing up, I always saw beautiful women performing and I'm like "Oh my god. I want to be that. I want to do that. I want to do that, but I can't. I'm a guy." You know because you're a teenager when you think these things. And, I would just say a lot of pop, but deep down I think Mariah Carey was the ultimate diva where she like always wore heels. If you ask me question about Mariah Carey, I'll nail it. Like I was so pissed when RuPaul's Drag Race had the Mariah Carey thing and they're like "What does Mariah Carey call her followers?" and I was like "LAMBS!" and they were like what? Who?

Interviewer: That wasn't too long ago

Lady Luscious: I know! I'm like bitch! I would've got that! But yea, I would say Mariah Carey probably played a huge part. I don't want to be like Mariah Carey where she's like always beautiful and gorgeous, but I want to be... Because she can also be slutty... So, I'm like the slutty side of Mariah Carey. It's kind of how I perceive myself.

Interviewer: So, this one is obviously optional, but do you consider your drag political?

Lady Luscious: No, because my political views are way different, like, I would, like I said, I'm a loving queen. Like I think I'm a hippie deep down inside like I'd rather just not have any politics and just everybody love and have fun and do whatever, you know. And not, not to throw anybody but it's just like, you know, being a Native American as well, we didn't really have politics or anything, you know, like, and I just felt like it was pushed on, you know what I mean? So, it's like we have to do it, you know now. So, I don't know, if I was to do politics I'd kind of view the person, you know whatever political issue it is or whatever and just weigh in a little bit, but I will not go out of my way to like "We need to change this now right here" you know? So, yea, my political reviews are kind of non-existent. I guess. Unless it's hurting our community.

Interviewer: Which is a big thing.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. Then, you know, so then it gets harder because then you know I still want to stand up for us and everything, but I don't want to be the person that brings up the issue. I guess, you know what I'm saying?

Interviewer: Like don't speak until its actually started.

Lady Luscious: Yeah. Exactly. Don't start anything unless it's gonna happen, you know, it's already there or something.

Interviewer: Affecting you at that point. So, are you apart of a drag family, house, or collective, or anything?

Lady Luscious: I am not. I, well I would consider myself a... I had to start off on my own, I guess you can say. You know you still have your sisters. We all consider ourselves sister's, you know and stuff like that, but, since I was going on and off in drag I never really got to I guess connect with another family or drag or anything.

Interviewer: Adopted into it.

Lady Luscious: Yea, exactly. So, I just kind of say to myself and like I said as well, I feel I'm a different drag queen where odd people don't view me as like a crazy outgoing drag queen. So, I feel like they, you know, like some drag queens say if their a quiet queen then they're a shady queen. And that's why I think a lot of people think I'm shady because I'm more quiet, and that's not the case. It's just, you know I respect people and I love people and you know stuff like that.

Interviewer: You'll let them get their say in too.

Lady Luscious: Exactly, yea exactly. So, I meant, my husband actually does drag so, actually technically he is my daughter in drag. So, which is kind of weird when she performs, I say this is my husband/daughter Lady Looks. So, I, in a way I have a family but it's just like me, my husband, you know.

Interviewer: Still counts.

Lady Luscious: I don't have like a... Exactly. You know I guess I started it but I'm in a drag family.

Interviewer: I like that. Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?

Lady Luscious: So, like from when I start or like all together, what do you mean?

Interviewer: All together. Just how has it changed you as a person?

Lady Luscious: It made me more open as far as speaking out for myself and others. Like when I was in high school like I was so, so quiet, you know, people would make fun of me because I was feminine back then too. I had long hair, I had no facial hair like, I looked like a girl, but I had a boy's name. You know that kind of thing. So, I was always, like, not really made... I was made fun of, but I was also in, it wasn't really a clique. We were just a group of non-white friends that kind of stuck together. So, we had a Mexican, a black girl, and then me, a Native American. So, we kind of stuck together because a majority of our school was white, so if I got made fun of my friend... She would always stick up for me. So, I never had not necessarily a backbone but a mouth to kind of back myself up. But, when I became a drag queen and I saw how drag queens are so like open and honest and stuff like that. It's kind of helped me open up my...

Interviewer: Whole persona.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. So, I mean, it's changed me a lot but in reality, it's also just helped me open up who I am deep inside. I want to show love for everybody and stuff like that. So, I don't know. I think the creativity part as well has opened up because you got to think of, you know, what you

want to do. What song you want to do. What wardrobe do you want to play? So, it kind of, it kind of keeps your mind going as well because you know usually when you grow up you don't have an imagination anymore sometimes, most of the time.

Interviewer: Loss in creativity.

Lady Luscious: Yes. So that kind of helps with that, you know, that why I think a lot of kids do like drag queens and stuff because they see how open and crazy they are too.

Interviewer: Gender normative is just lame nowadays.

Lady Luscious: Yea, exactly! It really is.

Interviewer: "Okay!"... How often do you perform?

Lady Luscious: I do right now about once a month. I can, when I was younger, you know, because again, when you get older, you're hurting more. So, right now I do once a month, when I was younger, I tried to do every weekend or every show that you possibly could, you know. But, when I got older and, you know plus, your career gets in the way a little bit, so you know. But, I do once a month now and that's usually just for fundraising. So, I consider myself also a fundraising queen because I just like to do drag for free, you know. A lot of times.

Interviewer: That means a lot.

Interviewer: What goes into getting ready for a performance?

Lady Luscious: My god...

Interviewer: I heard that RuPaul's makeup can take up to nine hours.

Lady Luscious: Yea... See, okay so. Oh my god, I'm just going to start from the beginning and go through. So usually, when I do drag, of course you have to hit your shower. You got to shave parts of your body that are going to be exposed, so your face, your armpits, your chest, all that stuff. Then, after that, you moisturize because makeup can dry your skin out. So, usually after I take a shower and shave and moisturize, I kind of let it sit for a little bit just, so the moisturizer goes away.

Interviewer: Sets in.

Lady Luscious: Sets in. And then I will play some music because I'm a person that I can't sit in silence. I kind of have to have music to kind of help me. I don't know why It's just been that way

Interviewer: Me too.

Lady Luscious: Yea. So, I play my music and then I roll my makeup bag out of all my makeup brushes. And then I grab my makeup which is a big box of all kinds of makeup.

Interviewer: Oh my!

Lady Luscious: Yea. So, then what you have to do is decide how you want to do your makeup. You know, so a lot of queens will either do their makeup, you know, like their foundation first or

whatever but I like doing. What I found out, you all have your own techniques because at first, I use to do the foundation and then eyes and then lips and all this stuff. So, I though, I was having trouble like when I put my eyes on, I have like black under on my cheeks and then I have to like almost to start over because I would have to wipe off all of the foundation and then go back.

Interviewer: And layer it all back on.

Lady Luscious: Yes. So now, I do my eyebrows and my eyes first and then I do my foundation which... The eyebrows don't take very long because I just cover over my eyebrows. If I wanted to go more crazy with eyebrows I would have to glue them down.

Interviewer: Yea, draw them on pretty much.

Lady Luscious: Yea, and then draw them on which gluing eyebrows, they suck because you have to put like five layers on, comb them down, five layers on, comb them down... And then you have to pat them down with your concealer and all that stuff. And then the powder to set it.

Interviewer: To make them disappear.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. So, that's why I just draw them on, on top of my other eyebrows, you know I'll sometimes pluck half my eyebrow so that I can have more... Up higher whatever.

Interviewer: Do whatever you do.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. So, I'll do my eyebrows then do my eyes. The way I do it is when I do like the cat eye or like the very crease and all that. You have to like slowly to draw them on and be patient because your lines have to be...

Interviewer: Sharp.

Lady Luscious: Sharp. They have to be pointed girl! So, so they are so... It's almost like you're literally an artist. Like you're painting a picture, but your lines have to be perfect and stuff like that. So, I make sure that I try to get perfect lines and stuff like that. Then, after your eyes, which that probably right there already took me about fifteen, twenty minutes, maybe thirty minutes depending on how things go because you know sometimes it's a bitch. Yea, so then you're like "God dammit!"

Interviewer: That one day you're just so shaky.

Lady Luscious: Yea and you're like "What the fuck!" And then you throw shit because you can't get your eyes. Yeah, anyways, that's just the beginning!

Interviewer: That's just the beginning!

Lady Luscious: Right! Right! Then you got to go through the whole other thing. So then after I do my eyes which is, normally, I do my cat eyes and then I color them in. So, all the black, you know. Then, I will do the crease, which you know makes you have, makes your eyes pop. That's more like it. So, then you draw your crease on and then you want to do your highlighting on your eyes, where you want it lighter, like in between here. Then after you do that, then you clean off your face where there was black dust. You know, like I had that problem before. So, you clean that

up. Then, you take, you know, like I said, each queen has their own type of way of doing their makeup. Theirs thousands and thousands of ways. Right, I forgot. Before all this, yes you put your primer on first. And then you do your makeup. I forgot about that. So, then it helps you.

Interviewer: I'm glad I know something about makeup.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. I was like wait I forgot my primer. No, yea, primer then eyes and eyebrows, and then I put a coat of foundation on of just like a skin tone color. And then I will take my lightest foundation, which I just use Mehron stick, for like this is like for stage makeup. And then I'll take like the really light and I'll put where it's going to be highlight areas. And then I'll take the darker part of the foundation which is going to be your contour. So, you take the dark where you're going to be dark for your contour and you add it on. And then you blend to the Gods. Girl, you blend! You blend, blend, blend as much as you can to make sure you have no lines. There are some drag queens, like me, like I want like this white to show right here like a line.

Interviewer: Like Trixie Mattel has.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. I don't really necessarily want to blend that out. I've been told by some queens "You need to blend!" and I'm like but I don't want too. I was like Roxie Valentine; do you know who that is? Like she has that, you know, I'm like that kind of what I want but I still want to be beautiful just because I'm not going to do crazy makeup like them doesn't mean that I still can't have like an edge.

Interviewer: You're unique.

Lady Luscious: You know, yeah, it's my own way of doing my makeup!

Interviewer: Every drag artist is different.

Lady Luscious: Exactly! So anyways, so I'll leave that. I'll blend a lot of it in and then I'll leave that there. And then when that is there you have to put on your beige-rose powder. It's just loose powder that you put all over your face to set all the makeup. And I use a lot of that because the more you do because you're sweating and stuff it's kind of, I don't know it helps create layers.

Interviewer: Keep it down.

Lady Luscious: Yea, exactly. So, that also helps you blend as well. When you start putting it on because before you put that on your face looks greasy. you're like "oh girl." And then you put that on. Then you start seeing Lady Luscious come out. Yea, you're like "Oh girl! Yes!" So then once you put that on then I go back through and I will take my white, it's called clown white powder, and you put it under your eyes. Where you want highlighted more, you know. But, I'll put it under my eyes, my nose, a dot on my chin, and then here on my cheek again. And then you let it set. So, while it's setting, I'll go ahead and start doing some contouring. So, I'll take a darker powder makeup which is usually, I mean you can use like blush or anything technically. But, you just take a really dark powder and then you start contouring. So, you want your nose to be smaller, so I usually start with my nose first and then I'll do my cheeks because you want that, you know, definition tone. And then you want to do your neck, so your face looks smaller. So, you do your jaw line to your chin then you do up here in the corners of your head because you

want your forehead to be smaller. Which, I don't have that problem because my forehead is small. Like I already have feminine features, so I don't have to do a lot, but I still do some here just to make it, you know, so it blends in my hairline and stuff for the wigs. And then, once that's in I'll brush off my white of my powder after it's set. And then I will start blending the lines. So, like the nose which is will be just like a line you just start blending it in to all your makeup.

Interviewer: Blend to the gods!

Lady Luscious: Yes! Blend to the gods, you know what I mean? Yeah, lines of that of the contour. And after the contour is done, then I do my blush. So, I usually put the blush on top of the contour and then put a little underneath here. And then after that I go back in and darken my black on my eyes if I get anything. And then do my lips, and then do the shimmer highlight. Like the Jeffree Star sparkle cheeks, yes. So, and then after that is done you spray your setting spray and then that is it.

Interviewer: Drag!

Lady Luscious: Yep! And then you do your hair, your earrings, and put your body on.

Interviewer: If you don't mind this question it is: How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender, identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Lady Luscious: How do I identify?

Interviewer: Yes.

Lady Luscious: As a male, yep. As a boy! As a beautiful boy. So, I identify as male, you know outside of drag, but I will be accidentally misgendered a lot, you know, go to the gas station or whatever "Thanks ma'am" like this morning I had an eye doctor's appointment and she was like "Ma'am what're you here for?" And she came closer and saw my chin hairs and she go "Oh sorry..." and I was like, you know, that doesn't bother me like it doesn't bother me at all, you know? Because being in drag you're called girl and all this stuff, anyway, it bothered me a lot in high school I think because I didn't come out as gay and I wasn't like into femme stuff.

Interviewer: Like your shield was up.

Lady Luscious: Exactly, that shield was up.

Interviewer: How does drag influence your sex and gender identities. You already before did drag, you said...

Lady Luscious: Yes. And so, I meant I'm still gay like I guess I don't want to, I don't know how to explain that.

Interviewer: Well this one may help it out: How does drag influence how you think about gender? As a whole, not just one's self.

Lady Luscious: I mean, I would say yeah, because you know then you start thinking... I felt bad for the women that have to like to wear this stuff so, you know, you start thinking more into the gender stuff and, you know, when you start learning about trans and all this stuff, then you start

understanding like, well then you start questioning yourself. Like, could I do this and, you know, I could wear women's stuff all day, I could possibly be trans but, you know, I think a part of it is, but I still like being a guy. So, that kind of helps me. But I respect, you know, how trans people and how women think and even as guys like how the guys think and stuff like that. So, it's kind of made me, yeah, it's kind of made me understand a lot of all kinds of gender, in a way.

Interviewer: That's good. There's so much. Like I was telling you earlier there's just so much.

Lady Luscious: Yeah, even cross dressing like I could see how sexually because a lot of cross dressers do it for sexual reasons. I could see how like the silky fabrics and the stuff could be feeling sexual so and it makes you feel really sexy, I don't know how to explain it. Women's clothes do make you feel sexy. So, I could see how people really feel sexual, you know, so, then again you think of like cross dressers and then you know everything else. But I would never have sex in drag. That's just not me. I just couldn't do it. It's too hot, your makeup is nasty.

Interviewer: That's what I was thinking. You got a lot of makeup on. I just can't imagine it all on.

Lady Luscious: Well right, and then you got padding like what the fuck are you going to do with the padding? You know you look like those beautiful women in padding and makeup and as soon as you start having sex things fall off, you're like "Hold on my boob is coming off. And my butt is going to pop out." So, you're like now you're just a man in makeup, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: How has drag impacted or changed you?

Lady Luscious: It, kind of goes back to the question... It just helped me be more vocal and helped me stand up for what is right and for what is wrong. If I see someone getting picked on or if I feel like something is not right, I feel like I'm more vocal now, where I could like to stand my ground and be like that's not right you know? So, I mean that's the only thing I think of like that's changed me, just to be the better...

Interviewer: Better person, better drag artist. How do you define drag?

Lady Luscious: I define drag as just it is an art form. I think your mind actually changes too, when you first think of drag. And it's also culture because, you know, when I thought of drag when I first started it was men dressing up as women for fun. Now it's not necessarily men dressing up as women for fun, it started becoming an art form. You know like, anybody is doing drag, even women are doing drag. You know, transgender, you know, people that were in drag for a while thought like they were more trans, so they'll turn trans. Well, drag

Interviewer: Experience drag.

Lady Luscious: Yeah, experience drag. So, and they still do perform and stuff like that. So, I think it just depends on who you are but as for me I view drag as just like an art form. A way of someone to express their other half I guess of their deep inner self.

Interviewer: I like that. Anytime you ask for a definition it's going to be different, and that's what I like, because at the beginning of the semester we get asked "What is drag to you?" And like a lot of us say the same answers. Some people in the class have never seen RuPaul's before and entering the

class like "Oh drag is just... It's a fun style of art or clothing or cross dressing" and it's not just that. There's so much behind it.

Lady Luscious: Because if you look at each drag queen, you know like mine's a little sluttier and all this stuff but then there's other drag queens that like are like so like monster. You know they do like deep...

Interviewer: Like Yvie!

Lady Luscious: Yea! Like Yvie.

Interviewer: She has a very different style. I think of Sasha Velour thinking about that too.

Lady Luscious: Yea, just like different and just like crazy. And she's actually from Illinois, I thought that was cool. From where I grew up and I'm like "Oh! bitch."

Interviewer: You've pretty much answered this: What do you think the purpose of drag is?

Lady Luscious: Yea, to express yourself, your inner self.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual? You're a sexy queen.

Lady Luscious: Yeah, so I like, it's kind of weird but I like teasing like straight men or men who are attracted to more femme things. I found it sexual, but I would never have sex in drag, but I do find it sexual when you like tease with them and you know joke with them and flirt with them, you know like that kind of thing. Like there was a guy at this last show, like he was just so like he wouldn't take his eyes off of me and I think he liked maybe femme or maybe drag queens. Because there are some gay guys out there that actually just like drag queens. So, it was just fun teasing. You know, you'll rub his face or something like that. It was just fun. I don't know. You flirt.

Interviewer: We bring up stuff like that too like why do straight men, even like towards gay people, still have a stereotype against them but they want to go to a drag performance and still sexualize and look up to the drag queen even though quote-unquote it's the same thing as you being a homophobe towards anyone on the street or in that club. But the drag queen is performing and... it's so interesting.

Lady Luscious: There's a lot. And that's funny because when you become a drag queen you also become almost like an instant celebrity in a way because so many people see your form and if they like it, they want to follow you. I mean you don't understand how many inboxes of sexual things I've got just out of the blue. "Man, you're hot." Dick pic, you know. Or like "Would you ever do this" or a lot of people even think I'm a woman. When my profile says his profile... his this... you know, and it says drag queen on there. And a lot of guys, you know, if you call them out... You know I'm a drag queen. I'm actually a man. "Oh man I didn't know that" but I think they wanted that secret like something like rendezvous. It's interesting, it's very interesting. And I'm thinking I wonder if like Lady Gaga gets stuff like this, you know what I mean? Mariah Carey, does she even get dick pics like out of the blue?

Interviewer: Does she even check them?

Lady Luscious: Right!

Interviewer: They have people for that at that point.

Lady Luscious: That's true, yea because especially if you're famous. But you know like it's different like you become a celebrity but it's not like that, it more sexualizing. Something. I don't know. It's interesting.

Interviewer: Even though there's controversy about RuPaul's and all that like minor things... How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Lady Luscious: It's definitely helped open up drag queens as far as accepting other types I guess you could say. So, you know like, instead of just having pageant queens you could just have like queens that just like fundraising queens, you know. They're not spending money to do pageants or stuff like that, you know, but they're still doing drag. Like Yvie Oddly, just like odd things. I think it helps bring out people. I think Sharon Needles was one of the first peoples who was kind of weird in the drag. "weird." that brought a whole different aspect and she actually won so I think it helped open up the spectrum of drag that's out there.

Interviewer: Compared to just being the woman and sexual.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. Right.

Interviewer: Because she, I know Yvie Oddly came out like a T-Rex once.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. So, it's like, you know it's not, yeah, it opened it up where, you know, like I said, when you're growing up you think of drag queens competing, men dressed in women's clothing, like that kind of thing. So, it's definitely opened it up a lot. I know a lot of people may not like it because it also helps take away from queens that are in town, you know what I mean? So, a lot of people will start following drag, RuPaul's Drag Race, but not necessarily tip the queens that are in bars and stuff like that too. So, it's both kind of, you know I agree with, you know, it's kind of cool she opened it up but then still feel like people need to tip their queens at bars and not pay three hundred dollars to buy a ticket to go see a RuPaul's Drag Race, you know what I mean? Or star.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Lady Luscious: I think just to be more accepting of everybody, you know. I think a lot of people when they, a lot of queens, when they do drag for a long time and they start becoming really influential in the community, I think they forget that the people starting out at the very bottom have a hard time. And I think a lot of queens forget that they were in that position at one time. So, they just need to, open up a little bit and accept and even help, you know. And I know the younger generation coming up are a little more emotional, you know? And it's hard to be that person to kind of look into someone's eyes and you know be like I understand, you know, sorry you're feeling that way type of thing, but I think we just need to open our minds and accept and be more helpful instead of saying, you know...

Interviewer: I've made it to this point you can figure it out.

Lady Luscious: Yeah, exactly. So, you know it's almost like I know it's all free and stuff, you know, it's not like a job. It's almost like going to a job and saying, "Okay you do your own thing." Good luck if you make it, if not you're fired. So, it'd be awesome if you just had like kind of like help each other, you know. Be sister's that we are and help one another.

Interviewer: What do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag? We kind of hit on this too.

Lady Luscious: Yeah, just, I don't know, misconceptions that everyone's a bitch! When no, not every drag queen is bitchy and crazy. But, I don't know, yeah, I just think everyone thinks all the queens are kind of like the same. You know what I mean? And they're not. Everyone is different in their own style and own way. So, because I'll even hear someone saying " Oh, I don't want to go to a drag show. It's all the same stuff." It's like no, it's not. People are different and drag queens are different. You got different things and stuff like that.

Interviewer: At Attitudes they got drag kings too that they call out, so you see the drag kings perform, and I think that's really cool.

Lady Luscious: Exactly. And then bioqueens, well I think they just like to be called queens now?

Interviewer: We say bioqueens in class.

Lady Luscious: Do you say bioqueens? Okay, because I know there for a while, they didn't like the term bioqueen and I can't remember what they, I think they were just called queens or something.

Interviewer: It would probably be around there.

Lady Luscious: Anyway, so yeah, bioqueens.

Interviewer: You choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag what would it be?

Lady Luscious: To just understand the person. Like that's doing drag. And being open about it. And just, I guess just understand that not everyone is the same. I don't know. I would just say, you know, just be open. I don't know. I mean I want them to see that, you know drag queens have always been here even way back when...

Interviewer: Yeah, in like in theater and all that.

Lady Luscious: In plays and guys dressed as women, you know, and even for fun, I mean people would probably wear women's things and start laughing. And in a way that's a type of drag, you know. So, I think people just need to open their eyes and I don't know, just accept... accept us for who we are, which it is. And what was the other part of that question?

Interviewer: What would you want people to learn or know about?

Lady Luscious: So, and just to learn, yeah, just learn to be respectful to drag queens. I think that would be good.

Interview with Logan Zass

To cite this interview please use the following:

Towner, Jazmine. 2020. Interview with Logan Zass. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*. April 25, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/loganzass/>

Interviewer: First, I wanna call and say thank you for doing this interview, I really do appreciate it.

Logan Zass Yeah, of course I love doing stuff like this.

Interviewer: Okay, so let's start, would you mind just stating your name, your drag name, age and where you're from. Oh yeah, I have to remind you, I'm sorry, that your being recorded of course.

Logan Zass Ok, that's totally cool. So, my name is Seb Nieves, that's my boy name, and I go by when I'm in drag, my drag name is Logan Zass, I'm 27 years old and I live in Chicago.

Interviewer: I do, too! Well, I'm in school right now, but I'm from Chicago also.

Logan Zass: Oh yeah? Where do you go to school?

Interviewer: I go to SIUE, in Edwardsville, it's right by St. Louis.

Logan Zass: Oh, okay okay.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's four hours away from Chicago, but that will always be my home, I love it.

Logan Zass: Chicago, yeah, Chi-Town.

Interviewer: Yes! Ok, so let's start, so the first question is, When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Logan Zass: I guess like, unknowingly, I always knew about drag as a little boy, um but I can say that my first experience with drag or the way I was like exposed to it was my mom's fault, really. She showed me this movie called *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*.

Interviewer: Yes!

Logan Zass: And it's like with uh you know with Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze, John Leguizamo. I think she showed me that movie when I was maybe like three or four. And ever since that movie I remember I was like dressing up in her wigs, playing around the house, in her clothes, putting on heels and stuff like that it was like, I can't imagine a little boy doing that stuff, I think that was like the first exposure I got to it. And then, Um it wasn't until I was in maybe 20, 21 one of my roommates at the time was doing drag at like this lesbian bar down the street from the apartment we were living at, at the time and she would do it for fun, do these karaoke nights and stuff, and everyone was always asking, what is your drag name? What's your drag name? I don't know, I was like I don't have one, I didn't want to do drag, I was so against it for some reason,

but then, you know Drag Race was on TV and I had my old roommate at the time and that was like everything that was kind of like exposed to me at the time and what really got me into wanting to do it.

Interviewer: Perfect, perfect. We just finished, in my class, we just finished watching season 9 so I've known about Drag Race, but I didn't really watch entire episodes like I do now, and I love it. I'm going to binge watch it over the weekend or something.

Logan Zass Oh my god, there's so much culture from the show like there's so much stuff you can say, and like, all of these things and stuff like that. It's kind of cool.

Interviewer: Yes. And my favorite was Shea Couleé but maybe I'm biased because she was from Chicago, but.

Logan Zass: Oh my god, that's my friend, actually.

Interviewer: Really? I love Shea.

Logan Zass: Yeah, yeah, she comes up from the same scene as like, well I'm not saying one of my *best* friends, but it's like...when I was getting my start into drag, she was, like, at her peak. She comes from the bar I work at a lot, which is the Berlin Night Club, she was a regular there. We would see each other around and stuff like that, and she made a movie in the city, and that was really cool and she was really inclusive with a lot of queens for that. But yeah, Shea Couleé, hometown girl.

Interviewer: I love her! Okay, second question, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Logan Zass When did I start? Is that the question?

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Logan Zass: Um I think I started, do I know an exact... I think I've been doing drag for maybe like four and a half years now. Um it had to be... when did I start? Um, it had to be the summer of, like, 2016? So when I started doing drag, like a said after my roommate got me into it and stuff like that, well I kinda like got myself into it because I like "paint me, paint me" after we would like prance around the house in heels at like four o'clock in the morning, just being idiots, just playing in heels keeping the neighbors up, just having wine and just being young and fun. Um he painted me, and he painted me terribly, I was ugly, I was so ugly, I was like oh my god, I need to see how I would look if I was pretty. Uh, I don't know what I was thinking because at the time I wasn't going to be able to make myself pretty because I didn't know what I was doing. So I went out and bought all this makeup, bought these crummy wigs, and was sitting in front of YouTube and I think I was a house queen for about 6 months, I think I really just sat in the house, I come home from work every day and paint my face, and just try new things and play with different looks and stuff like that, and it took me 6 months to feel comfortable to actually do like an amateur show where you just walk in, put on a CD, and compete for some money and I actually won, so, and then after that I caught the bug, I mean I'm not saying I looked good, I mean I thought I looked good but when I look back in the pictures I'm like "oh my god" I was a booger.

Interviewer: I think we all do that because I look at some of my old high school pictures and I'm like "Oh what was I thinking? That did not match." Like oh my goodness, that did not match at all. I don't know why I did that. Okay, another question is, How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag queen?

Logan Zass: Um, that's a good question actually, um so I kind of like told all of the women in my family and they kind of just saw on Facebook and stuff. Everyone just kind of slowly caught on. At the time when I first started doing drag I had my older sister living with me so that, kind of, where I was getting all of the makeup from and she was totally on board with it at first, I mean she's, I think the only thing that pissed her off is that I was constantly ruining her makeup brushes and constantly stealing her makeup, I think that's the only thing she was mad about. But she wasn't really mad about drag. Everyone else is kind of like "Okay, this is...okay" like they didn't know what to think of it at first, and they were like you know, because I didn't look good and it was hard to be like "this is art, this is artistic," and then as I got better, you know as I continuously done it and stuck with it um everyone was like really in love with it now. They're like "wow you really know what you're doing" and "You look great" and been really supportive.

Interviewer: Yeah you really do, you look great. You look really good.

Logan Zass: Thank you.

Interviewer: I was looking at your Instagram and I was like "God, snatched" like, I love it.

Logan Zass: It takes a long time to get ready. Anyone can look like that, you just got to give yourself the patience.

Interviewer: Look, I don't even know how to put on highlighter. My friends always make fun of me like "You're doing it wrong." I tried to get in to YouTube. I'm trying to get in to it this summer. Really that's my goal this summer is to have a beat face, but I'm trying.

Logan Zass: You gotta practice, that's really all it is. Y'know, my sister is always like, "Oh my god I want to look like this." Well you have four hours to sit in front of the mirror, you can. And she's like "Oh no, that's too long." I'm like, then stop complaining. That's usually what, me and my sister bicker, but, it's really not that bad, I mean, it's hard but really it's like, anyone could look like this. If I'm a man and I can get dressed up and do this there's no stopping anybody.

Interviewer: That's very inspirational, so where does your drag name come from? So, where did you get Logan Zass?

Logan Zass: Okay so Logan, Logan Zass comes from, so Logan is because I'm born and raised in Chicago and one of my favorite neighborhoods that I kinda grew up in a little place called Logan Square, I don't know if you've ever heard of it.

Interviewer: Logan Square. Yes, yes.

Logan Zass: It's like a big party scene now, it's a lot different than it was, but Logan came from that and then also, when I was in middle school there was a girl named Logan, and she wasn't like that pretty but she, like, was our Regina George from Mean Girls, she was kinda like the "it" girl

even though she wasn't.. It's just funny to think of, so I was like "you know, that has to be my name." Like she was the boss of school and I come from Logan Square, so it has to be Logan. So, I always thought that was school and then "Zass" comes from uh, one of my favorite actresses is Drew Barrymore, she did the movie *Charlie's Angel's 2: Full Throttle* and it's like a big thing in pop culture, so like Helen Zass, it reveals her name is "Zass". And if you think of it, you're kinda talking about her butt, like "Oh did you see Logan's booty," or like "did you see Logan's ass," so like "oh I saw it" and it's kinda like punny play on words, and I was like let's roll with it.

Interviewer: I love it, I love it. I never thought of it like that until you just said it and now, I see it and its obvious

Logan Zass: Yeah, I know, I really have to break it down. If you're at the club and you see me perform the club and if you're kinda tipsy you kinda get it, and then when you see me doing all the booty shaking, they totally get it but it does take a minute, but I'm not mad because all of the other names I had were not that good.

Interviewer: Why, what were some of the other names you had?

Logan Zass: I had like, Zass was always in the part, I don't know why but Zass was... But I wanted to be called Chardonnay for a second. And I was like "Oh my god if I was named Chardonnay y'all could have called me Chardi-Z" that would have been great.

Interviewer: I love that! That's cute!

Logan Zass: If I get a drag daughter then maybe she can have that. I mean, I have drag daughters ,but they don't want that name for some reason. And one after that was Bella Bambi and I'm glad I didn't pick that because there's other queens with Bella and there's other queens with Bambi in it, so I'm glad I didn't pick that one. I had this other one, Priscilla Ray, the names go on and on, I just had all these dumb names.

Interviewer: Well, I love Logan Zass. I'm happy that you picked that one.

Logan Zass: Thank you.

Interviewer: Alright so, there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, from drag queen and drag king to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen, and camp queen, among a lot of other names. So, are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do? What's your style of drag?

Logan Zass: Umm it's really hard to say because like, I feel like, the type of drag that I am is not what it would particularly be labeled as, like classically what we would call it. I consider myself a club kid even though I don't present as a club kid but I feel like my upbringing, what I do and where I work. I work at a lot of clubs, so I wouldn't say club kid, I'd say more of like a club queen because I don't really feel like I fit in anything else. I mean I do glamour, but if I really had to pick, I really don't like when people say the word "banjee", like, can we do something else? I don't really like "ghetto fabulous" either, I'm just like, I don't know, I like very urban chic style, that's kind of like what represents me, like if you ask me like what inspires my drag, like where

it comes from and like what Logan is all about, I'm like if you think of like a Hip-Hop rapper, you know like a rapper, maybe even like a Hip Hop- O, or video mixed with a maybe like WWE wrestler, that's kinda of what like Logan Zass is, just very hype on energy, love a lot of like stuff that's so tacky that I love it and I want to make it look glamorous. But yeah, let's say like, club queen, that's really where I feel like I fall, where I align and everything. Because I don't really do classic, and glamour, I really do modern and current right now with style.

Interviewer: Okay, okay, so does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist, do you think?

Logan Zass As a drag artist?

Interviewer: Yes

Logan Zass Um, it can, yeah, definitely because there's certain realms for certain genres if we're talking about that, and for certain shows my drag is maybe just a little to current and too trendy to kind of pop into a lot of the shows. Like, you know, we have our super monsters and stuff like that. You knows the girls get really, you know, really theatric with the makeup and it's gets kind of crazy, even though they look really glamorous. Then you have, you know your pageant drag and I don't really fit in the pageant queen, and then you have, you know you have your more niche, geeky type of drag where it's more cosplay, which I don't fit into, so it definitely can hold me back but I feel like it definitely works in my advantage, and other aspects as well.

Interviewer: So, who or what has influenced your drag?

Logan Zass: Like influenced my drag? I think I just kinda piggy back off, ever since I was a little boy I always been a big fan of Lil' Kim. I think that's like the first album I ever owned was the *Hard Core* album, I think I was like seven. So, it was always like female rappers, I don't know, they always did something for me, when they were on TV I always had to turn up the music, I had to like jump around always, because they were different, and you know we grew up in like a male-dominated world with all these guys, where they can talk about whatever they want but then the women have to , do these little things, like act cute and pretty and do things they really don't do. And female rappers have just always did whatever they wanted, did exactly what the guys did. Maybe got some crap for it, you know from the media for being too raunchy and stuff like that, but I really always admired that from women so that kinda just really set the mark for what I wanted to play into my drag. Before I even knew it because before I started doing drag, I was really big into women's hip-hop whether it was someone like Nicki Minaj who was at the top of her game or going down to underground artists and stuff.

Interviewer: So, who would you say is your favorite female artist right now? Is it still Lil' Kim or is it Cardi, are you Team Cardi or Team Nikki?

Logan Zass: That one's hard, because I feel like I'm so on the fence with them. I mean I love them both, don't get me wrong, obviously. But when I have to pick a side, I'm like "I don't know!" Sometimes there's things I like that Nikki did and some things I like that Cardi did, there's things both of them did that I don't agree with. So, I don't know.

Interviewer: See, that's the same thing I said.

Logan Zass: But my number one right now, who I'm really in to, her name is Stefflon Don, she's from the UK. She's like, really cool. Now, I mean she's kind of getting a come-up, she's kind of been doing some [inaudible] stuff, but.

Interviewer: I think I'm more like, I love Cardi but I can't forget about Nikki, but I just don't like her music right now. But her old albums were bomb, but Cardi right now. Cardi- I love Invasion of Privacy, so I'm kind of biased, but Nikki really set the platform.

Logan Zass: I think what Nikki is. Nikki's kind of a very talented rapper and stuff like that and we love that. And she's put out good music, and maybe the later stuff isn't as great. But what we love about Cardi is she's so personable and she has so much personality and she's likeable, you know. And that kind of sells the music and she's got good lyrics, like the crap she says. Like we were just watching a Cardi B video on Instagram and that's kind of what we fell in love with Cardi for, you know, watching her make hip-hop and stuff, so. I think that's what Nikki lacks, she lacks a bit of relatability sometimes because she wants all these characters and that's not really her. So now that we've got Cardi we're like "Nikki bye, we got a new girl." But that's how it is with female rap, it kind of sucks though because, you know, we kind of get like a good run. Then, if you think about it each popular female rapper, usually in their fourth album is the last album they'll ever do, then after that no one cares about them no more.

Interviewer: See, I also, we were talking about that in class too. We were talking about how people get on a Nikki bandwagon but now like they're on Cardi B so I'm like, maybe it's just whatever's in style right now. But I do think we relate more to Cardi because she's more personable, like she's easier. Like, I could see myself having a conversation with her rather than Nikki Minaj.

Logan Zass: Right, well I mean you could, you know, Cardi's that girl from down the block and acts like that girl from down the block. You know, Nikki was once that but she don't act like it no more, and I think that's why we all really love Cardi right now. I don't know I could sit around...I'd want to go to dinner with Cardi, I want to go to her house I want to do all of these things with her, but Nikki, I think I would just take a picture with her then walk away

Interviewer: Yeah, I want her to teach me how to do the "Ookuuurrrt", I can't do it but whatever she does.

Logan Zass: It's funny though because, it's crazy because you watch Drag Race back in the day a drag queen was saying that. I'm like "Did Cardi get that from Laganja Estranja?" Because before Cardi was doing it we had Laganja saying it. Cardi was making it, she was just rolling the r's a lot harder. But Laganja was saying this on Drag Race a long time ago so I'm like, "Were they stealing this from Drag Race?" But people steal a lot of stuff from Drag Race, so I don't know, we'll never know.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was about to ask you that, because I think a lot, do you think that the drag queens set the scene for a lot of fashion now. It's just drag queens do it first and people come and copy it. But it's a lot of things that I see and it's like "Oh yeah, drag queens were doing this first," but we're just now seeing it.

Logan Zass: Yeah. Well, I think drag queens set the bar for a lot of things like make-up and what you said, fashion, and even slang and lingo and stuff like that. A lot of things we're saying now, like for fun and stuff and like that like "read you," "ki," that all comes from back in the 80s and what all the drag queens were saying in New York in the ballroom scene.

Interviewer: Exactly, like the "shade" and we just watched...

Logan Zass: "Shade", "No Tea, No shade", all that comes from, yeah "I'm not trying to read you," "Don't come for me," all that comes from like, New York.

Interviewer: Exactly. I think, what is the documentary? *Paris is Burning* a lot of that...

Logan Zass: *Paris is Burning*, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So, do you consider your drag political? If so, it says, why or why not?

Logan Zass: Umm, I don't think my drag is political, um it can get political in other aspects and stuff like in a performance, but I don't think what I do is generally a political, like I wouldn't call it a political drag, when I think of drag. When I think of drag, especially my drag, I don't want to bring any negativity to the stage, or any negativity in my life. I feel like when it's my drag I want you to look at me and I want you to be happy and feel really good for however long I'm on stage, regardless of how long I'm on stage, whether I'm just hosting and I'm only on stage for like a minute just talking in the mic or If I do a five minute number, I just kinda want you to forget about whatever is going on outside of the bar and just have fun. But I do give it up to the queens who, you know. Another good friend of mine, The Vixen from Drag Race is very in the political drag and stuff like that. And it works for her, stuff like that, sometimes it doesn't. But I think that if you have a voice and you know what you're doing, and you know how to execute things then go for it.

Interviewer: That's understandable, I went to my first drag show last, like two Fridays ago and I want to go to so many more. It was so fun, it was one here in Saint Louis at Hamburger Mary's, it was really fun. Like, I enjoyed it.

Logan Zass: I've always heard Hamburger Mary's has some good shows.

Interviewer: It was so much fun. So, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Are you part of a drag family, house, or anything?

Logan Zass Yeah! Actually, I am. So when I started, we started as more of a conventional drag family, not something you would see on *Paris is Burning*, maybe a year into drag um I met my... When I started going out after I did that first performance and caught the bug, I was like "oh my god, I need to make friends I can't just be out here by myself," so I started going to bars dressed up in drag, I started performing for free, because that's what you have to do when you're new in drag, going to ever drag show for free, go out every weekends for free in drag, just letting people know who you are, becoming a little socialite and what happened was I met some of my roommates, who's my best friend at a bar and we started doing other competitions and stuff like that and that's how you kinda win competitions, if you win by votes, and like, popularity and by cheers and stuff so we kinda knew what we were doing, so like let's make friends with other drag

queens and win these competitions so we can make bookings, to get further, where we need to be. So then, before you know it we had formed a little house of like eight queens, us included like me and my friend and roommate so it was like eight of us and with that it became a like, little drag house, we were all just like sisters, it wasn't like a mom, or a mother and stuff like that and we all kinda just looked out for each other, that's how like all of our makeup skills got better doing our makeup together, doing these shows together and eventually that led to getting our own show which is called #SquadGoals and still actually going on which is still going on which is kinda crazy, after three years of progress, the show is called #SquadGoals and we kind of made that our name in the Chicago scene, and we're still intact, I mean like some girls have left the house, which is cool and their doing their own thing but like we're still friends, we started with eight, I think we're down to like five now.

Interviewer: So it's "Squaggles"? Can you spell it? S-Q-U-A-G-G-L-E? Did I spell that right?

Logan Zass: Squad Goals? Okay, so remember that hashtag right? And it was like #SquadGoals. So like S-Q-U-A-D

Interviewer: OHHH Squad Goals ohhhhhh. Oh squad goals, I'm sorry, I had a dumb moment.

Logan Zass: It's okay, we kind of got it from the hashtag, because we were the young, new girls on the group and we thought like let's be cute and trendy and kind of play off of all of our drag characters and what we're putting on. So it just became Squad Goals and after a while people just started calling us The Squad and it's kind of crazy. But it's not, we're not in full pack as we were before, like we're not as full force. When we first came out it was the hottest thing and we were the it girls, the new girls, we've gotten older now so the show isn't exactly what it was. We were like eight girls onstage doing choreography, doing a big group number like Destiny's Child mixed with, what's the other group? That UK group, I can't even think.

Interviewer: Spice Girls?

Logan Zass: Yeah! Like, Spice Girls mixed with Destiny's Child on steroids, that's what it reminded me of.

Interviewer: I would love to see a show like that.

Logan Zass: And it was fun, I'm pretty sure if you look us up on YouTube you could see some of these funny performances we'd all do. We'd do like, duets and group numbers with like, a group of eight. Or if it was down to two girls, we'd have a lot of fun doing that. And these are some people that I still call my family and my best friends and stuff like that to this day. Now on the other hand I have gone off and I've started my own thing, not started my own thing. I wouldn't say what I'm doing is like "Oh we're creating a huge house," but I do have two drag daughters now, which I never thought was going to happen, so now it's, I'm a drag mom, which is interesting, it's hard but it's a lot of fun and the payoff is nice.

Interviewer: So, how often do you perform and where do you perform? Where in Chicago?

Logan Zass: So, I have like the local bars where I usually work at in Boystown in Chicago, which is the gay neighborhood here um probably the most bars. I'm going to say the three bars you can catch

me at, I've probably worked at every bar in this city, even some that aren't in this neighborhood, um the main bars, like home bars, I would say Brewland Nightclub is probably number one, second would be Charlie's Nightclub and then you can also catch me at SideTrack from time to time, but I'm usually a guest at most of these clubs, though.

Interviewer: So, it's this like a weekend thing for you or do you do this every day?

Logan Zass: Um it depends, sometimes I can be booked like 2-3 times a week, sometimes I'll have no bookings in the week. It usually depends, I'm not a resident at any bar per se because I do work a 40 hour day job, and I still do drag on top of that. So, drag is definitely part time. I'm trying to figure out, I mean I could definitely do it more full time and kind of see where I could get in as a resident at one of those, but I kind of freak myself out with the funds and stuff like, "How am I going to survive?" you know? But it's definitely doable I have a lot of friends that are full time drag queens.

Interviewer: What goes into getting ready for a performance? I know you said the makeup takes a couple of hours, so what else, how do you pick your outfit? How does it go?

Logan Zass: Um so I kind of go off of the outfits of what I'm going to perform, so when I get booked for a show and then we start talking about themes, or if the show doesn't have a theme then I kinda pick what I wanna do and from there I kinda think up the costume from what wig I'm going to where to what costume, what shoes, stuff like that, how I wanna do my makeup and that usually takes me, I'll probably be thinking about it all week, really, like one look. I think about multiple looks, cause you know in Chicago, I'm pretty sure you've seen at drag shows, we do costume changes and we switch outfits, and stuff. First you want to think of a makeup look that's going to be kind of universal for every look that you're bringing that you're going to be changing in to, and I usually base it off of the song, like how the song is going to make me feel, I kind of wanna make it, like when I perform I want to feel kind of like I'm in a music video.

Interviewer: I love that! Yeah when we went to the drag show I didn't expect so many costume changes. It was amazing to me and all of them were great. It was not that one was better than the other, it was, and some of the queens were making them handmade. Do you make your stuff? Do you sew or how do you make your costumes?

Logan Zass: I can sew, but my sewing skills aren't great. I can fix something, mend something, but to actually complete a whole piece, I'm not there yet. I do have other people make my outfits, like I pay people to make my custom stuff. Sewing is not out of reach for me so say, if I did Drag Race or something I could definitely pull something together, I would definitely have a pattern with me. But, yeah, it's not my strong suit. It's not something I could technically say I enjoy doing, like most queens enjoy making a costume, it's just that I get frustrated with and like "I'm not having fun here so I'm not going to do it."

Interviewer: What are your biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag queen? What do you think is like, hard? Is there anything hard about it or challenging?

Logan Zass: Um yeah there's always challenges, I guess there's a couple. Staying relevant is really hard sometimes, because if you're not going to be in the clubs all the time um then it is really hard to

kinda stay and have good momentum, like continuously have bookings and stuff, because I feel like if you wanna take a break then you kinda have to figure out when and how you're going to step back in, you have to have like a really good friend who runs the show whose going to be like "Yeah you can come back now," um and then also maintaining your sanity, because I feel like doing drag, if you're doing drag all the time can definitely, take a toll on you, you know like being in a nightclub all the time is really, really bad if you think of it, and if you have the willpower to not get drunk every single night while you're doing these things, you're probably doing a really good job, because I am a self-proclaimed, like I go by Logan Zass, The Pint Sized Pimp and Party Princess, so besides performing I love being a socialite and being a socialite if you're at a bar means a lot of drinking, so I don't say I don't have a drinking problem, but when I'm in the show and in the gig and stuff like that, I would say sometimes drinking too much is definitely hard for me, cause I don't know when to stop. Because you're having fun and stuff like that then you're like "Wait, I'm out here taking all these shots with all these people and I forgot I have to do a number in 5 minutes." It's hard. and you get up there and the lights and all that alcohol hits you and you're like "What's my words again?" There's a couple times where I'm up there and I'm looking at the video and I'm like "What was I doing?" Having too much fun. You always need to remember that this is still a job, that's sometimes the hard part. It's just like, you're having so much fun but still take it seriously, you're working. That's what I try to tell my drag daughters, like it's okay to have a great time, but just remember that you're out there, someone is paying you to do something, take it seriously.

Interviewer: I agree, so Is there anything unique to the drag scene in Chicago compared to other places in the country or world? What do you think Chicago has to offer differently or anything of that nature?

Logan Zass: Ooh, like I always say every queen loves the city they came from, and they're usually like... I think Chicago has some of the best drag in the world, simply because I think everything here is so polished, like there's something about Chicago, like when I go to other cities and stuff, and I don't know if it's just me being nitpicky but the queens there just don't, like they're great and I'm not saying they're awful, but I feel like when we set the level like we do here, I just feel like it makes it better. Like a lot of cities don't do outfit changes, a lot of cities don't wear nails, a lot of cities don't wear boobs, and there's just different things and stuff like different styles in the way people do drag, and I just feel like here it's just like very neat and polished as opposed to other cities. I don't know if it's because Chicago originally started as pageant drag back in the day here, it was really popular here, so I would assume that kind of transcended everything else into the melting pot we have going on now, but the drag queens here who are the working drag queens, everyone is really really put together. Like in New York, New York has some really good drag too, but I feel like they didn't start getting their stuff together until some of them were coming here, because I remember when Monet X Change was here, did you see her season yet?

Interviewer: No.

Logan Zass: She's on Season 10.

Interviewer: I just started the first episode, but I didn't finish it, I was just so excited that I saw Eureka come back that I didn't even finish the episode. I love Eureka Season 9, I loved her.

Logan Zass: So, you're just getting started. But yeah, Monet is the one who came in with the broom. I think she came in with the broom. She kinda looks like a little miniature Bob the Drag Queen. But she came here one time a couple years ago before she was on drag race and she was blown away. She was like "Wait, y'all wear nails, y'all do this? Y'all do that?" and I was like "Y'all don't?" And then I went there and I was like, oh, they all wear one outfit the entire time, they'll do like three numbers in the same outfit, no nails, nothing. What is this when you put on the smallest pussycat wigs, just like, what is this? And the crowd is eating it up and I'm like, they need to go to Chicago baby, because we'll show them how it's done.

Interviewer: That's so funny because now that I live here for school and I'm really close to Saint Louis, and I have some friends that are from Saint Louis and they just, they do stuff so different. It's like everything over there, Chicago in 2015 to me, like their hair and their weave, and everything it's like they just got on to lace fronts and wigs and you can tell and I'm like "You guys, you just need to come to Chicago because I think you need a little help." I just notice some things I'm like, Chicago's been there, done that. Maybe Chicago's just like up one on everybody.

Logan Zass: Chicago is very ahead of the game I think Chicago is a very progressive city, not just for drag but for everything, like what you just talked about. People don't got good hair in other cities and I'm like "What? Lace front?"

Interviewer: They're just catching on to things like, and not to get off topic too much but guys, they're still wearing Jordans that we would never ever wear in Chicago, I'm just like, "Yeah, no, we wouldn't do that" that doesn't work for us.

Logan Zass: Drag them, yes.

Interviewer: I definitely agree with you 100%. So, How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression? It also tells me that you don't need to answer any of these questions if you don't feel comfortable with them at all.

Logan Zass: No I totally feel comfortable. I think it's very important, and think it's a very hot topic, Um I definitely identify as queer, most of the time, when I'm out, doing my regular, you know, when I'm not at work basically, I identify as queer. Definitely gender fluid because I do drag, it's like really hard to just be like "Oh I'm a man" because when I'm in drag I don't want to be called a man when I'm in drag. I don't like "He" and those pronouns and stuff like that if I'm in drag. If you call me Seth when I'm in drag I'm probably going to look at you and I'm probably going to push you, I'll be like "Excuse you." So I definitely like the pronouns to be correct when I'm in drag. So I usually just say I'm queer, when I'm at work and stuff like that, you know, my professional job I guess I'm just gay, I don't care

Interviewer: That's understandable, well, the next question was what pronouns do you use in and out of drag but you just answered that one so

Logan Zass: It's funny because in and out of drag me and my roommate we're both drag queens and we both do drag and even when we're out of drag we call each other by our drag names and we still refer to each other with like she and her pronouns and even when my mom comes up we still do that. It's weird, my roommate will be like "Logan's over there and she's doing this and that" and my mom just gets it, it's kind of funny. When we interact with each other, when we interact with other drag queens, and other people who just get it, we don't care what pronouns we use, but that's just for me, I don't really know what anybody else goes by. But for me, I just really don't care. You usually refer to people how you met them, so a lot of people meet me in drag so when they see me they still say she, her and use Logan, however they'll see me and they'll still probably say she/her whenever they see me, so.

Interviewer: Yeah, I see that a lot on RuPaul too, like even when they're out of drag they'll...

Logan Zass: Yeah in the workroom when it's just boys hanging out.

Interviewer: Yeah because my favorite one is Trinity Taylor, like she reads baby. She's like "Gurl that drag was not cute yesterday" or something like that so it's like I noticed that too.

Logan Zass: I love Trinity Taylor.

Interviewer: Trinity reads honey, I, man.

Logan Zass: Shea and Trinity, that's who should have been lip synching, just, just so you know, that's what I think.

Interviewer: That's what I feel, too.

Logan Zass: For that crown, but I guess the new rules were intact and Sasha Velour got to that, but okay.

Interviewer: I mean, I love Sasha Velour because I love her drag. I think she brought something totally different than all the other girls. But to be honest, not to throw any shade on Peppermint, but I think that she should have gotten eliminated a while ago and I feel like Shea should have won, honest to god.

Logan Zass: If we're judging on your track record and how well you did throughout the entire season it should have been Shea and Trinity at the top.

Interviewer: Exactly

Logan Zass: But, I guess, you know, in Drag Race anything can happen. So it's just like, we want to throw in a new twist at the end and that's how you win now. And I'm like, "Oh, so that's how you win now?"

Interviewer: I'm also like, when it first started, I thought Valentina, honest to God, I thought Valentina had a good shot, but she really messed herself up with that lip synch. She messed herself up so bad, I was so disappointed. I was like "Oh my god Valentina, you wanted to go home, how you did that." It was terrible. Poor Valentina. Anyway, I'm glad Sasha won because she's so different and this could bring more candidates like her instead of you know, thinking they're not, you

know, RuPaul Drag Race worthy. But, I just really think Shea, Shea really should have won to me.

Logan Zass: We thought we were gonna have it, we haven't had a Chicago winner yet, we thought Shea was gonna be the one and then that happened. And I'm pretty new, but it was a very somber day in Chicago when Shea didn't win.

Interviewer: I was just like "Oh my god" because I just knew she had it in the bag, I knew it.

Logan Zass: Oh, everyone was saying it before Shea got on Drag Race, there were so many interviews with other drag queens and stuff like that like "Oh if she walks in the work room while I was there I would just go home." So, everyone already knew that Shea was ready to play, so.

Interviewer: I don't know, I was so, I don't know, my feelings were hurt. I was like "Oh my god, she didn't win?!" like "Why?!" like.

Logan Zass: For somebody who has like, I was doing like, I had done Shea's amateur- Shea was running shows and I was competing in her shows and to just be in a basement with her and to see her get ready, and watch her perform, and not only look beautiful, but have these amazing costumes and then move the way she moves. It's very intimidating, but it's very inspiring.

Interviewer: Yeah, she's really, really good. So, how has drag influenced your sex and gender identities, and if so like... I'm sorry the question was, Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities and if so, how?

Logan Zass: Um, it has actually. It's influenced it a lot because it made me one love myself a lot more and appreciate the way I look out of drag. So, I think that's what it is because before I was doing drag I would spend so much time trying to be a perfect boy, trying to look amazing um, and then once I started doing drag I just didn't care anymore. I just didn't care I was like 'you know what I look great, I love this,' drag really has like helped me love myself like and my identity more than I ever did before I was doing drag, which is kinda silly, because if you think of it because you take all the makeup off and then all of a sudden you're like "Wow, I like this."

Interviewer: That's beautiful, I love it, I love it. Has drag influenced how you think about gender? If so, how?

Logan Zass: Umm yeah, because before I was doing drag I really didn't understand gender and gender identity and what people thought of themselves and what are the correct terms and pronouns and stuff, and it wasn't until I started doing drag that I learned to respect it and then I learned that everything is not so black and white and that there's a whole gray area out there, that's a beautiful area and there's so much you can learn about. So that really taught me a lot because I have a lot of friends that don't just go by gay or they aren't just lesbian and they do have separate pronouns, so that's been really helpful.

Interviewer: I learned about all the different, well I knew there was different pronouns for everything but it was just more than I thought and I was like "I'm so happy that I opened my mind to this because I would hate to offend anyone." You know what I mean? That uses different pronouns that I didn't even know about, so I was happy I took this class because of things like that too. We

lost five minutes, it's okay, don't worry about it. My recording stopped on me, I'm sorry, I heard everything you said. It just made me, it just shocked me a little bit.

Logan Zass: I'm pretty sure that's not a great feeling, when you saw that I was like "Oh, man"

Interviewer: Oh, my goodness, okay, we should be okay now. I think we only lost about four or five minutes, so that's okay.

[The audio recording is missing the next piece, but it was transcribed by the interviewer.]

Interviewer: Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag? (If so, how?)

Logan Zass: Girl, I'm way more confident now, when I'm on that stage I'm Beyoncé and no one can tell me different. Drag gives you the encouragement to be the person you always wanted to be inside.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time as Logan Zass what advice would Logan Zass give to your younger self?

Logan Zass: Two words: Be yourself.

[The audio recording resumes here.]

Interviewer: I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice-versa, how drag has impacted your identities. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities, such as your gender, race, class, your age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, anything like that has impacted your drag? How do you think those things coincide?

Logan Zass: I think it goes back to what I was just saying, if I could go back and talk to old Logan and tell old Logan, "Girl, you don't need to be a white girl to get booked, it's going to be okay," because that's what I thought was an issue like most of the queens who are working are white, so I definitely felt like coming from a mixed background, like I'm Black and Puerto Rican so I definitely thought like "Oh, this isn't is palatable" there's a very select few girls of color that they choose to put in these shows, um and I thought I wasn't going to be one of them, and sometimes I wasn't which is fine, but I didn't think that, that would be something that would really bother me, and it really didn't occur to me until some of my friends were like "Why do you do that, why do you paint like that" like some people when I get out of drag would be like "oh I thought you were white" and that would really hurt my feelings because then, like, certain shows like Black Girl Magic came out and I wasn't doing that, and then other shows called Doodle which is Latinx and stuff like that, and I wasn't being asked to do any of these things and I was getting very offended, and I was just like "Why am I not being asked to participate when this is my culture?" and my roommate was like "Girl look at the way you paint, get it together," so I definitely feel like that helped back then, it definitely helped me get to where I am now, because now I'm more confident in what I do and I know exactly who Logan Zass is and does and represents and that'd definitely come from having a little self-realization and loving yourself a little bit more.

Interviewer: Do you think you defined whiteness as the standard of beauty when you first began?

Logan Zass: Yeah, that's what I thought in drag at least. Through drag, the drag world, it definitely seems to palate towards making a white woman or the features that a white woman have beautiful, and even in terms of what RuPaul does, she doesn't really help in that sense, of like, she always wears a blonde wig and she wears these gorgeous gowns, and then she's like, it doesn't really help because the one person we're looking to who is a black man who does that, and we're like "Oh that's what I have to do."

Interviewer: I never realized that until you said it, but she does wear a lot of lighter makeup.

Logan Zass: And I'm not trying to throw her any shade or anything, but like her thing is being like, is being like, like a trophy almost. And it's just like a trophy-style real white woman. But I do know where RuPaul's character is coming from, if you've ever watched a movie called *The Queen*, from the 60s, it's like a pageant movie in the 60s. RuPaul is definitely kind of inspired by this one drag queen, who did drag until she died in her 90s by the way. Her name is Flawless Sabrina, and it was very bad. If you ever look up Flawless Sabrina you'll definitely see where RuPaul draws his inspo from.

Interviewer: I'll definitely look it up, because I'm like one of those type of people, like, I like to know everything about what I'm interested in.

Logan Zass: You should look it up. It's such a good movie. There's a lot of racial issues in that movie, it's in the 60s and there's a lot of riggery and stuff like that, but. The judge of the movie, that I'm like, "Oh my god, that's RuPaul, mixed with like Alaska Thunderfuck. That's her."

Interviewer: Wow, I'm going to look that up, because we have to do a film review also for this class and it has to be a drag, uh a drag based movie.

Logan Zass: Oh my god, you should totally do it on that. You can find it on YouTube, by the way, too.

Interviewer: Okay, I'll definitely do that because I watch, I watched, it's new on Netflix, it's called *Dumplin'*, but it has a drag spiel in it, but I want to watch something more because I didn't think it was that draggy, it wasn't.

Logan Zass: Well you want something all about drag then.

Interviewer: Exactly, it was more like, you know, the drag queens help the kids win the pageant or whatever, but I want to watch something more like, drag based, so I'll definitely watch that one.

Logan Zass: You should definitely watch *The Queen*. You might have to type in like 1960 something and it'll pop up, but.

Interviewer: I'll definitely, definitely look that up, because I was like, I mean, I could write a review on it, but it's not anything, I'm like "Oh yeah, this was definitely drag related" it was okay, it wasn't the best to me. Okay, last, well, it's not the last question, we have about six more, how do you define drag?

Logan Zass: Ooh, I define drag as, so drag to me is basically anything that you're not, in your everyday. I mean, I guess people say like every day is your drag, and stuff like that because it's your, you're not naked or whatever, but I think drag is almost like fantasy. Like, you get up and

become something that you wouldn't particularly wear on the street every single day, and it's kind of like taking it to a fantasy world and becoming like a superhero, so that's kinda of what like I look at it as.

Interviewer: So, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Logan Zass: Oh, the purpose of drag is definitely one, to look good, just kidding, two, it's definitely kind of making everything a question mark. I think that's what drag is for, to raise an eyebrow, that's why I love that drag isn't just for men, women can do drag. If you want to do female impersonation and you're a woman, I think that's totally fine, and I think drag is for, to bend all of the rules, there's really no set rules for drag even though we say there is because we read each other the rules outright. But if you really think of it there's no rules.

Interviewer: I love that, so do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not? And If so, how and in what way?

Logan Zass: Um I don't think it's intentionally supposed to be sexual, no, um I think if you're, from experience, a lot of guys are sexually attracted to drag queens in that aspect, but like I tell them, I don't do drag for sex, there's a difference there. But it can be sexual if you want it to be, is I guess that's what I'm saying.

Interviewer: I understand, umm, and we've been talking about it, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Logan Zass: Um, it's done a lot of amazing things for drag, I think it put drag on the map, and it's made it so much more mainstream. But in that aspect I think it has also hindered drag too, because you know RuPaul always lets us know that "just remember, this is my decision," so he's basically telling us you don't give a heck about what America thinks. You just think "This is the winner because this is RuPaul's choice," so that's why I think it has hindered, and I would love to eventually like to see a new show, can we can get "America's Got Drag" where we vote for our favorite drag queen, I'm tired of this one person picking our winner all the time. Which, it's an amazing show, it's not a bad show but you see what I'm getting at, it's just one opinion that you are constantly getting to pick our winner, putting on display. Even though they're kind of winners, and stuff like that, but I feel like some drag queens get done really dirty on the show.

Interviewer: I agree, I totally agree. I would, like I said, I only watched season nine, but I feel like some of the queens didn't get a chance because some of the challenges, not everybody's going to be great in all of the challenges, and some of the challenges are kind of like a setup. Everybody was kind of hating on Nina Bo'nina Brown.

Logan Zass: I mean, it's a TV show so it's definitely like, when you think of it, some queens are getting cast to go home first and some queens are definitely cast to win.

Interviewer: I agree because the first one to get eliminated was Jaymes Mansfield, I believe her name was, and I feel like, when I, cause I, everybody, when I watched the *Whatcha Packin'* for her and I looked at her YouTube and she's very funny. And I think maybe if they had some more things for her to do that were more comic, like comedian wise she would have stayed longer, but it was

the very first episode and they were doing something totally different, so maybe she didn't get the chance she didn't.

Logan Zass: She didn't get to do her kind of stuff, and of course she didn't do well.

Interviewer: Exactly. Speaking of that, do you think that bioqueens should be allowed on RPDR?

Logan Zass: I do, I think anyone who does drag should be able to do drag race. It's just plain and simple, it's a drag show, why not, they do drag?

Interviewer: So, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be? Why?

Logan Zass: Ohhh, if I could change one thing, that's hard because sometimes I like the way it is, but I guess one thing I would try and change, or I guess, that I don't like about the drag community is how cliquey and, you know, like it becomes turf wars and stuff like that, and that gets very annoying. Like everything is like, you can't work here you can't do this because I'm friends with this person, it's like high school sometimes.

Interviewer: I think that comes with a bit of everything, you have that whole high school spiel you could change. Do you think it's more like, possessive, like this is mine and you can't have it, or do you think it's more welcoming?

Logan Zass: I definitely think it's welcoming but I don't think it's a high tolerance level for drag queens, like drag queen to drag queen, like I feel like there's not a lot of tolerance, like if you do one thing and somebody doesn't like it, you're immediately done, I don't like that. Like why are we so quick to cut somebody in the mouth like that, everybody makes mistakes.

Interviewer: I agree. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag? Where does it come from? And what do you think would help change that?

Logan Zass: Um, I don't know, I think there's a lot of misconceptions of drag. I think one, people think that we're freaks, people think that we're trans, well most of us are, well not most, a lot of drag queens are trans, but I think that, that's the biggest misconception that we're confused about our gender identity and what we wanna be in life, like if you come to a drag show you will completely see what's going on and I think that's what it is. Like you don't know what you're talking about because you're talking out of fear, and confusion so you have this assumption and that's what it is

Interviewer: Now we read this article in class about how those who are trans are kind of exiled from the community, is that true? But it was based if not in New York, maybe Detroit. It was an article, either New York or Detroit, I'm blanking on which one it was. But they said like trans people or trans drag artists are exiled from the community, is that true and do you know anybody?

Logan Zass: I think it's getting better, I do remember once upon a time it was true, but as of lately I don't think that, I mean I do see as of lately there's been a lot of incidents towards hate towards transgender women and transgender men, but not as much as before, not that, that's a great answer but, I think it's getting better, but I do think that was true like 5 years ago.

Interviewer: Final question, if you could choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Logan Zass: One thing that I want people to know or learn, besides it being fun, drag is very, I don't know, you can learn a lot from a drag queen, like from going to a drag show it's a big learning experience. I know it looks all fun and games and stuff like that but as soon as you go to a drag show, your first drag show you're probably going to leave feeling so knowledgeable about something that has nothing to do with drag, like a drag queen can teach you a lot. Drag queens is taking over.

Interviewer: I agree, I agree 100%. I love drag queens. Their fashion sense is like, impeccable.

Logan Zass: That's why we're in demand! Drag queens are taking over. Did you see that RuPaul was in Vogue?

Interviewer: Did I see RuPaul's in Vogue?

Logan Zass: Yeah!

Interviewer: No, I haven't.

Logan Zass: That issue came out yesterday, I was like "Is this the first drag queen to be in Vogue like this?" I don't know. I need to find out.

Interviewer: I need to look it up when I get to a computer. Well that completes our interview, I would love to attend one of your drag shows if you would like, I won't be in Chicago till like mid-May, actually I would be in Chicago the second week of May, and if you don't mind I would text you before I come. I would love, love to attend one of your shows.

Logan Zass: Yes, you follow me on Instagram, I keep everyone updated there on my story.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

Interview with Mahogany Knight

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Robson, Marleina. 2020. Interview with Mahogany Knight. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 15, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/mahogany-knight/>

Mahogany Knight: Hello?

Interviewer: Hello? Oh man, it must have. There we go, I think we got it.

Mahogany Knight: Okay.

Interviewer: I think my app was just trying to fidget with us.

Mahogany Knight: Oh okay. No worries.

Interviewer: How's your day going?

Mahogany Knight: My day is going good! After being in the office all day, it is so nice to be outside and just sitting in Mother Nature.

Interviewer: Oh, I know, I do not blame you.

Mahogany Knight: Yes, and you? How's your day going?

Interviewer: It's going well, I just got out of class and just trying to set up all this computer stuff that I don't know anything about.

Mahogany Knight: Oh no! You need a good I.T. person.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh, I know.

Mahogany Knight: They are worth their weight. Trust me.

Interviewer: Oh, I know.

Mahogany Knight: Because, I.T. I know very little about, but I have several guys and girls on hand that I can call if one of them's busy.

Interviewer: Yep, my little sister knows so much about computers and I'm like, excuse me, I can't even turn my computer on.

Mahogany Knight: Oh, that's funny.

Interviewer: Well, I really appreciate you doing this for me.

Mahogany Knight: You are so welcome! I'm honored. I'm always willing to help and give my whole point of view.

Interviewer: Yeah! I have my questions up it's just, it's for my class. We're doing a Sociology of Drag this semester.

Mahogany Knight: Uh-huh, oh okay!

Interviewer: Yeah! We've been watching Season 9 of RuPaul's Drag Race and we're going to write an analysis paper on it.

Mahogany Knight: What?!

Interviewer: Yeah!

Mahogany Knight: That is awesome!

Interviewer: Yeah, it's been super interesting and definitely it's been great to learn way more than just what, going to a show you would learn about. Getting more in-depth details.

Mahogany Knight: Yes.

Interviewer: I've liked it a lot.

Mahogany Knight: Well good! I've always thought, I've wondered if I'd ever go on there like, "Why not? Why not?" One of these days I might submit my application, just to see what would happen.

Interviewer: Well, you might as well. It's either you don't go, or like, maybe you've got the possibility.

Mahogany Knight: Right! Exactly, and the worst thing that could happen is like "No, no, no." and I've been told "No." so many times in my life it's like "Okay! Alright!"

Interviewer: And just move on with it!

Mahogany Knight: Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: Alright, well, I'll get into it.

Mahogany Knight: Okay!

Interviewer: Our first question is, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Mahogany Knight: I first heard about when I was a baby myself, back in 1986. And I was actually still in high school, living in Jacksonville, IL.

Interviewer: That is where I grew up.

Mahogany Knight: Oh, okay, yes that's where I grew up! And so, was dating a girl over here in Springfield. And her friend was always talking about going to see drag queens. And I was in Jacksonville. I had no idea what she was talking about. And she was like, well don't tell your girlfriend but I'll take you. My best friend at the time, well, still is my best friend but we were in high school, she was like, "I'll take you guys to see one." and I was like WHAT? So, she brought us over here and we freaked out. We were like oh my god, what is happening? I mean some of them you could tell they were guys, but some you were like no way, but I was so afraid; I was

really scared. So, whenever they would come and get close to me, or someone was tipping them and the person tipping them was close to me. I would get really, really nervous and uncomfortable. But that was my introduction to drag.

Interviewer: Wow, that is awesome.

Mahogany Knight: Yeah!

Interviewer: I would say mine was definitely probably RuPaul when I was really young.

Mahogany Knight: Was who?

Interviewer: RuPaul, when I was really young.

Mahogany Knight: Oh really? Oh well the first time I had heard her music; we were all like applauding. It was like oh my god! You're a drag queen. I mean I started doing drag by then, but there is a drag queen singing on the radio. And in the club. So, like, this is unheard of! It was pretty cool.

Interviewer: That's awesome.

Mahogany Knight: Yeah.

Interviewer: When did you start performing as a drag addi... drag artist; and why did you start performing?

Mahogany Knight: You had it right the first time, a drag addict. I'm just kidding. No, I started on February 14, 1991. It was one of those things where my best friend, another one of my best friends, he was producing a pageant; The Miss Valentine pageant. And I was over at his house, and he was getting everything ready. And I was like "I'm going to do it!" and he was like "you have never even done drag; why would you enter a pageant?" I was like because "I have seen it a lot. I think I can do it. It is just an extension of theater." He was like what are you serious? And I was like yeah. So, I decided that night, the night before that I would do it. So, I asked a good friend of mine to do my makeup after I finished work. I borrowed everything and I ended up winning the parent, and every category of the pageant. And oh my gosh, that is where the addiction started.

Interviewer: That is awesome. How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Mahogany Knight: How does my family and friends respond to it?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mahogany Knight: I have, I think I am one of the lucky ones because my brother is gay. And he made my coming out so much easier because he is older, five years older. He had already dealt with it, and they had already dealt with him. They had experienced what being around a gay person is like, so, when I came out it was, like, easier. I didn't initially tell my immediate family about the whole drag thing. But, in turn they all found out and my brother happens to be one of my biggest supporters. Actually, when I went to my first big national competition, he was one of my back up dancers.

Interviewer: Oh, that is awesome.

Mahogany Knight: Yeah, so there's nothing like having that kind of family support, when they're going to be there to dance for you. As far as friends, they knew that I was going to do it. It was just a matter of time. Now I would say, I have the best group of friends I could ask for.

Interviewer: That's awesome, yeah, I went to one of the shows in Springfield with some friends. It was amazing. You guys did great.

Mahogany Knight: Oh, thank you. I wish I would have met you then.

Interviewer: I mean I went up to, and I can send you the picture. But I definitely wish we were able to stay, and I was going to meet you.

Mahogany Knight: Yes, please. Definitely, send me the picture, I would love to see that. As long as it is not some crazy action shot where my hair is going one way and my tongue is going the other way and my boobs are falling out.

Interviewer: No, you definitely had the crowd going. It was a lot of fun.

Mahogany Knight: Oh good, that is so important, that's good. That is what we are all here for, to make sure you guys have fun. I mean you guys could be anywhere you wanted to. But you guys choose to come and watch us. So, we want to make sure you have a good time while you're there.

Interviewer: Yeah, it was amazing and put on really well. I thought it was great.

Mahogany Knight: Good, good, good, good, good.

Interviewer: Where does your drag name come from?

Mahogany Knight: It comes from a combination of things. Uh, Diana Ross was in a movie back in the 70's and the name of the movie was called Mahogany. And, the last name I really did not have a choice in. The lady that was producing, or the guy that was producing the pageant, her name was Crystal Knight, and she was like "I don't care! If you're gonna do it, I don't care what your first name is but you're going to be my sister." So, I had to be a Knight and I am ok with that. I was very honored to be inducted into her family as her, actually her only sister. We are all that we have. But we have a lot of offspring. Phew!

Interviewer: Yeah, you were talking about that at the drag show. I thought that was super interesting how you guys definitely take in younger performers, who are not necessarily as experienced and help them with them with their performance or with certain things. And I think it is so great that you guys literally call it a family because you guys are together for so long and it's such a sentimental thing.

Mahogany Knight: It is. And when I say family, I really mean that. They are like my family, I care about, not only about their wellbeing on stage and their performance but how they are doing in life. Are they living their best life? Are they staying in school, getting an education? Instead of just going to the bar and partying and blowing a good chance at a great education. I like to think that I really motivate them to stay in school because I tell them drag is always going to be here.

Finish your school, get your education; then come back and put on a wig and a dress. Or if you can do both, great. But, don't slack, don't slack off, uh-uh.

Interviewer: I think that is great.

Mahogany Knight: Thank you. Because I really do take that motherly roll now, grandmother, and then I have some great-great grandchildren. It's like holy shit. Oh, sorry professor.

Interviewer: Oh no you're okay.

Mahogany Knight: Sorry about that.

Interviewer: Oh no you're fine. There are a lot of term for types and styles of drag, from drag queen to drag king to glamor queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, so on and so forth. Are there any particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Mahogany Knight: I am more of a pageant queen. My first time in drag was a pageant. And it seems like I have always done pageants throughout my career, and then I went to nationals and I won the national pageant.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was definitely doing a lot of research for this. You have literally done so many amazing accomplishments.

Mahogany Knight: Thank you! Thank you, yes, but I would definitely consider myself a pageant queen. I mean I do it all though. I do comedy. I do country. The genres of music I do span the whole thing. There's nothing I won't do, because I don't want the audience to come out and think; oh, she is going to do this, this and this.

Interviewer: Mhmm, predictable.

Mahogany Knight: Yes, I don't want ever want to get that way. So, I try to mix it up. I do rock n roll, country, R&B, comedy. You name it, I do it.

Interviewer: Does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist?

Mahogany Knight: Does the type of drag I do affect my life as a drag artist? I'm not sure if I understand the question.

Interviewer: I think it is mostly asking, since you do more pageant queen, does that affect anything else in your life? Or is it mostly just stage?

Mahogany Knight: Oh, okay. I would say that I do focus a lot on perfection as far as when I'm on stage. I don't know if it affects me so to speak. But I'm always looking and thinking. Every time I hear a song, I think wow that could really be a great talent number for a pageant. Or, when I go to a pageant and I'll think "Wow, if she only did this, tweaked her talent a little bit she might have won" and I see a gown I think "How can I change that to make that more of a competition gown?" So, my minds always in the pageant mode. Which is probably not good. It's probably an addiction, I think.

Interviewer: It is probably why you are so successful to be honest.

Mahogany Knight: Maybe! I don't know. I don't know if that is true or not. We'll definitely go with that.

Interviewer: I'll go with it. Who or what has influenced your drag?

Mahogany Knight: Oh, my goodness, there are so many over the span of my career. I mean when I first started out, of course it was Crystal Knight because her... now she has to be one of the best live MC's that I've ever met. I mean she is my sister so I might be a little biased. But she is literally. Where a lot of comedy people, they have a pre-written skit about what they are going to say, do. But, hers is all live, right on the top of her head. I admire her for that. Um, Anita Mann was the first person to put me in drag. She is very creative. She really looks at a talent number and she can choreograph it, dance in it. And then the late, great Whitney Page; she was out of Texas. Holy Moly. She was probably the one that I look up to the most in drag. Her glamour, her beauty, her stage presence, her eyes; if you ever get a chance google her. Whitney Paige. Amazing entertainer, we lost a good one there.

Interviewer: Do you consider your drag political? Why or why not?

Mahogany Knight: I don't. I try to leave that for me. I try to leave that off the stage because I know I have a lot of fans who are, who vote opposite than I do. And that is okay. We all have our beliefs. We all get our time in the magic voting booth to do what we feel is right for us personally. So, I don't use my time on the stage to promote one political party or another.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?

Mahogany Knight: Sure, it has to be one of the most. A typical day? Not the 9-5 but the drag part.

Interviewer: Yeah, I mean, does it affect anything else in your life?

Mahogany Knight: Yeah, it does, it has, it can, and it probably still will. And a lot of people in the community that will not date drag queens. There is a lot of um.

Interviewer: Stigma around it.

Mahogany Knight: Yes, it's like come on, I can be more masculine than you. This is just a character I create for stage.

Interviewer: I know, you're going to go and perform and have fun and entertain.

Mahogany Knight: Yes, they will come and support the shows and be there and cheer us on, and that is it. They want nothing else to do with us. I'm like huh interesting. But then you have the ones that only want to date you because you do drag. Yeah, that is not going to happen either. That is not going to happen. Because I am not a performer that's in it every day. I enjoy doing my shows, entertaining, hanging out. And at the end of the night, I have a nice Neutrogena makeup wipe, and it goes all off, right into the trash can. I know I am a goofball. But it is true it comes off at the end of the night.

Interviewer: I definitely agree, I love my face wipes more than anything.

Mahogany Knight: It gets packed up to the next show, and on we go. But no I am not one to just sit around and cook dinner in drag, or vacuum the floor in a night gown or nothing, no.

Interviewer: Two different kind of ways.

Mahogany Knight: Yeah, yeah, I mean for me it would be. But, others do it that way.

Interviewer: It definitely is super diverse, and it is definitely a spectrum, not just everybody is like this or everybody is like that.

Mahogany Knight: Yes, that is correct. So many people have a type casted it and when they find out that I do it. They are like what? Because I am a bigger guy. I am not like super thin. You can guess.

Interviewer: I'm in the same boat. I'm definitely not a small person.

Mahogany Knight: They're like "What? You? You do drag?" Yeah, I do. I throw all this man around on that stage in those high heels.

Interviewer: And I work it.

Mahogany Knight: Yes, I try.

Interviewer: You were great. The reason I was able to get a hold of you was because of Jenny Ritter and her friend Renee. They just talk about you so highly.

Mahogany Knight: That is so sweet. It was so good to see them this past weekend.

Interviewer: Yes! That's I was going to go with them, and then I got super sick.

Mahogany Knight: Oh no, well things happen.

Interviewer: I know, then poor Jenny got something, something scratched her eye or something. But she had a great time. Every time I talk to her, she always gives me the highest remarks for you, and she thinks so highly of you.

Mahogany Knight: Aw, I got so many of them. This is awesome. I am just kidding, I will be honest I am very well loved and respected in the community. I don't know how it happened. I just try to do the right thing. I'm not an angel, I am not perfect, but I try to put on the best show that I can and not offend anybody. I try to keep my name out of the paper. So, I don't know. I often sit back and wonder. How did I get so lucky and receive all this love from this community? And really, sometimes I just sit back and think wow, ok, I did it.

Interviewer: I know. I definitely agree.

Mahogany Knight: Well thank you. All I can say is that I'm blessed. I'm very, very blessed and humbled.

Interviewer: I was very excited for this opportunity and I so happy that we are doing this.

Mahogany Knight: Oh, I am honored, really, I'm so honored. Anytime I can help out, you just give me a call.

Interviewer: Oh, I definitely will.

Mahogany Knight: Do you have any more questions?

Interviewer: Yeah, there is still a good number. I'm sorry.

Mahogany Knight: Oh, no no. I know you said it would take about 30-45 minutes. I do not know how long I have been walking. I have just been walking in the park.

Interviewer: That is where I want to be, but this computer.

Mahogany Knight: It will be here when you get ready.

Interviewer: Oh, yes. How often to you perform and where do you perform?

Mahogany Knight: I perform probably 3 weekends out of the month. Not full weekends, but maybe a Friday or Saturday, sometimes a Sunday. I try to refrain from Sunday since I work early on Monday morning. But, it's the holiday, like my Labor Day or Memorial Day. Those are already booked. And Station House is my home bar, or Club Station House is my home bar. Which I absolutely love, I feel like I'm a relic in that building but I love it. But I travel all around, all over the country. I have never performed internationally. But I have performed in a lot of the states. I was just in Mississippi for one of their Mardi Gras balls. I have never been to a ball before. They're really close, they are only like 40 minutes from New Orleans, where I performed at. And I was like "Wow! This is very cool! This is... lots of pomp and circumstance that goes into these things." So, when I was Miss Gay USA at-large I traveled the country. So, that was probably one of the best years of my entire life.

Interviewer: That's awesome.

Mahogany Knight: Yeah, it was. I took a year off from work.

Interviewer: Yeah, you have to really enjoy it.

Mahogany Knight: I did. I did. I didn't have the restraints of going to a 9-5. I had a great company that I was working for. And they said okay, you won, what are you going to do? My partner at the time said if you want to do it right, you've always wanted to do it, do it right and take the year off. I will make sure everything is taken care of. I went to my job and they said okay, as long as we know you are coming back, we will hold your position. And they did, they worked short-handed for a year. And when I let them know I was ready, it was like here we go.

Interviewer: It must have been amazing to have all that support.

Mahogany Knight: Yes! That's what I was telling you. I am so blessed. I often sit back and wonder how and why. Why me? Why was it me? I mean, I'm not complaining, I love it. But I see so many other artists that struggle. That really struggle, they have a rough time, either getting bookings, getting family support, trying to find a job. And I do not know if it is them, or I don't know. I am just thankful that I have been placed in the position that I'm in.

Interviewer: Yes, I agree. What goes into getting ready for a performance?

Mahogany Knight: First and foremost, I can sew. I try to think of a song that I would like to do for the show or song. And then create costumes, themed around the song. Or if I know I am going to do a big dance number, I will just create a dance costume. Or, if it is a slower number, I'll make a gown and then add all the embellishments on it.

Interviewer: Wow, that is awesome.

Mahogany Knight: Yeah, I just try to look put together from head to toe when I walk onto stage.

Interviewer: Jenny always talks about how great your outfits are. And I definitely was not disappointed.

Mahogany Knight: That just warms my heart, that there are people out thinking so highly of me. It really does.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is always nice to hear.

Mahogany Knight: Yes, it is, it's like don't say it when I'm dead. Don't save it for your 3 minutes, say it now and let me hear you.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique about the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country?

Mahogany Knight: Hold on, I am going to have you repeat that. I apologize.

Interviewer: You're good. Is there anything unique about the drag where you live compared to the country?

Mahogany Knight: Oh, absolutely. I think sometimes drag can be very regional. Like here, I try and groom the girls to look their absolute best and not take short cuts. Because you never know who is in the audience seeing you for the first time. Or you never know who we have visiting from out of town, out of state, out of country. And we want to make sure that what they are seeing is the best, so that way when they leave Springfield, Il they say good things about our queens. I have been to places where, it's not a read or anything bad, but I have been to places where their version of drag is going to the mall and buying just clothes off the rack. And I was like well, my thing is if what makes us special if the girl sitting in the audience has the same outfit on that you have on. I don't like that. I think a lot of your drag should be made, custom made. Either for you by someone else, or by you, so that way it's unique and the audience is going to say "Wow. Where did she get that?" And you say, "You have to have it made." You can't just go to DEB and get a little ol' cocktail dress. But there are girls that do that. And that's okay for them it's that is not what I feel appealing on stage. Now don't get me wrong, I do go to stores and get some dresses that I would use to tip around after the show, or before the show, or if I'm just hanging out on a whim. I don't have a show this weekend, but I will just get in drag and hang out. Then absolutely I will go and find a little cute dress and wear it. But normally I try to custom make all my stuff, so that it is unique to me.

Interviewer: I think that's definitely a good take. The next couple of questions are about sex, gender and identity. Are you comfortable answering these questions? If not, I can just skip them.

Mahogany Knight: No, you're fine. If you ask it, I'll answer it. That's always been my motto. If you can ask if, I'll answer it. That's always been in my motto, if you ask it I'll answer it.

Interviewer: Exactly. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Mahogany Knight: A gay man.

Interviewer: So, pronouns would be like he/him?

Mahogany Knight: Yes, however some people who have known me and have known me in and out of drag, regardless of where I am, they will scream it out, "Mahogany!!" I could be in the mall "There she is, there is Mahogany!" But how I identify out of drag is he/him. And all that is really new to me. I volunteer at the Phoenix Center. This is all the he/him. Yeah all that is really new to me. The first time I went there, and they went through that whole thing, I was so lost. Wait, what?

Interviewer: What are you talking about? Has drag had any influence over your gender identity?

Mahogany Knight: No, not at all. I am able to keep them separate, very very separate. When I'm in drag I like to have a good time, depend on acting like a girl for a few hours in the evening and then I can wash my face and Mahogany is in the trash can or packed up in the suitcase. Then Dean comes out and it is all good.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Mahogany Knight: Of course, you're welcome.

Interviewer: How has drag impacted or changed you?

Mahogany Knight: Oh. It has impacted my life in a very positive way. I was able to be included in a family that I was not born into. I have created a family that they were not born into. But we are still a family at the end of the day. We fight, we argue, we disagree, we hug, we laugh when there is happiness. We cry together if there is a sadness. So, without my drag family I would be a very, very lost person I believe. They really affect me a lot as far as being there for me and knowing they are there for me. They know that I am always there for them, regardless of the situation or things that they are going through in life. It is just nice to know there are people out there that you can count on, and they are not blood related.

Interviewer: Yeah. Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Mahogany Knight: No, um actually it has not. However, I have seen the difference when guys, or just their guy persona is out, and then they are very weak, quiet, shy, introverted. But, as soon as they put on their make-up, they are larger than life. And I'm thinking who are you? Where has this person outside of drag? Um, my best friend who passed on, he was very shy and introverted. But, once he put on drag it was wow, a whole other person. It really was. It was great to see because at the moment he was living his best life. And like I said earlier, that what it is all about, living your best life and having fun.

Interviewer: That is awesome. If you could go back in time as Mahogany what advice would you give to your younger self?

Mahogany Knight: I would let her know that she is in for a lot of heartache, but through that heartache she is going to continue to find inner peace, within herself.

[The audio recording cut out for the last couple minutes. The interviewer and Mahogany said goodbye, the interviewer thanked Mahogany for their time and for sharing their thoughts and stories.]

Interview with Rachel Michaels

To cite this interview please use the following:

Love, Emily. 2020. Interview with Rachel Michaels. *Sociology of Drag*, SIUE, April 24, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/rachel-michaels/>

Rachel Michaels: Hello?

Interviewer: Hi there, how are you doing?

Rachel Michaels: I'm good, how are you?

Interviewer: I'm good.

Rachel Michaels: Well great, I've got some time for you today.

Interviewer: Great, Great, that's good to hear. I'm sorry we got a little conflicted yesterday, but I'm happy that we were able to work it out.

Rachel Michaels: Yeah it was just one of those days where my dad needed me, then my sister needed me. It was just one of those days where I thought I had time, but I've got plenty of time today.

Interviewer: Well good, that happens all the time, it's completely understandable. So, did you receive the research participation form that I sent to you?

Rachel Michaels: I did, but I didn't read it. But I can now.

Interviewer: Well that's okay just so long as you have it you can read it whenever you've got the time and you can just e-mail me if you have any questions or concerns, okay?

Rachel Michaels: Okay.

Interviewer: Alright, well we can go ahead and start if you're ready.

Rachel Michaels: Yeah, sure.

Interviewer: When did you first hear about drag?

Rachel Michaels: Hmmm... The first time, like the very first time I experienced drag when I was probably a teenager. Like 13-14 and I saw Dame Edna Everge on TV. One of the older queens from Britain. It was on NBC and she had her own show called Dame Edna's Hollywood and that the first time I really just knew. You know, there was something about that that I enjoyed.

Interviewer: Was that your initial reaction to it?

Rachel Michaels: It was just this, you know, as a kid, I just didn't know how to describe it. But it was just this overwhelming interest in what I was seeing. This man that was dressed up as this character - with the mob hair and the big glasses. You know? If you know who Dame Edna is.

It's just one of those things that intrigued me as a teenager, and I didn't know why. Of course, years later, of course you know - I know now! (laughs).

Interviewer: When did you start performing as a drag artist?

Rachel Michaels: Let's see, I came out of the closet when I was 18 years old and then I started out doing drag as a Halloween joke. Let's see, I actually started doing drag for Halloween when I was like 16. I did Dolly Parton at a friend's Halloween contest and the next year it was Tina Turner and then the next year I was Dame Edna. And then when I came out of the closet at 18 I was able to go to the gay bar here in Paducah and then I started doing drag shows as Reba here at 19. I actually did my big Reba illusion for Halloween when I was 19 and I won third place in the Halloween contest. Then, I got invited back to do the shows each and every Wednesday and it just kind of started from there. From a Halloween... to a career.

Interviewer: Is that why you started performing - because you were invited back?

Rachel Michaels: Yeah, I mean, you know at 19 here in Paducah, Kentucky that was the only place you could do that. Then of course, I started going back cause I had an interest in performing. So, they invited me back every Wednesday and it kind of grew from there.

Interviewer: How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Rachel Michaels: Well, my mother and my grandmother actually helped me in those years when I was growing up. Like doing Dolly... and so forth. Then after I started to come out of the closet, my family received it, uhm, extremely well. Now, some of my distant members that I don't see - they didn't understand. They were more prejudiced about that. My immediate family accepted me right off the bat.

Interviewer: I saw online that your drag name is Rachel Michaels, but you also go by Reba. Is there one you prefer?

Rachel Michaels: Well over the 24 years I started working in the casino look alike shows - you know the professional ones. The gimmick there was that we were men impersonating your favorite female celebrity. So, we started using our own names - our real names - Brad Fennel as Reba McEntire. And so, after I did that, I started, just wanted to be known as myself. I mean, Rachel Michaels is basically a character now instead of just my drag persona. It's just more of a character - you know, the glamour drag. Everybody usually knows me as Reba anyway. I'm known for a variety of things and they just call me different things, I guess.

Interviewer: Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Rachel Michaels: Uhm, labels, hmm. Well, I know I'm funny. I'm a good MC. I'd have to think about you know, certain labels. I don't think I've ever really had any labels for myself more than just an entertainer.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah because there are some labels that we've been introduced to, such as glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen. I didn't know if you felt yourself align with any of those.

Rachel Michaels: Well, I do prefer uhm... to do my celebrity illusions. My first and foremost thing, I'm a celebrity impersonator. That is what I love to do, and I admire those the most who can look like celebrity. Of course, I admire the drag queens as well. The glamour queens, of course. You know? But my thing is celebrity impersonation.

Interviewer: Right. Who or what has influenced your drag?

Rachel Michaels: Has influenced my drag? Oh wow. Uh, wow. Hmm, well of course, Reba, of course. I was a huge fan of Dolly Parton. Then, there is Dame Edna of course. I've worked with some great people through the years that have influenced me. Like the great Cecile Craig. He does Liza Minnelli and I worked with him in a few shows out in Tahoe and whatnot. He really influenced me in how to be a real professional lookalike. Then of course our MC of the show was James Gypsy Haake. Of course, I mean, his comedy and MC style has really influenced me.

Interviewer: Do you consider your drag political?

Rachel Michaels: Uh, not necessarily. I do speak my mind when I'm MCing. I'll cut some jokes that are kind of sketchy (laughs). A little political here and there. I kind of like to cross the line. To see where that line is with my audience, how far can I go with a joke. Can it be about politics, can it be about religion? Those kinds of things. You know, even racial barriers, I kind of cross those too. Cause you know, I believe in equality and if we can joke about every little thing and then maybe those things will ease up. So, when you come to my show you can expect at least to be offended at least one time, but it is all in fun.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate on any occasions where you've made your drag political?

Rachel Michaels: Not necessarily, because I'm all about the show as a whole and, of course, you know I feel a time when I'm out there MCing and I just kind of go off of the energy of the crowd. I don't think there's any one instance where I've made it political. I'll talk about anything, really.

Interviewer: Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?

Rachel Michaels: Well, of course, my personal life I am more confident in myself then I was when I was growing up. I was a shy child. But as I've grown up, I've found my voice. It has been through my artistry as a female impersonator just being able to get up and speak my mind and be respected for that.

Interviewer: How often do you perform?

Rachel Michaels: Well, we had a club here for a year-and-a-half called ShowTime. We hadn't had a club in Paducah for about 8 years until we come along. So, we were performing at least every Saturday. But we have a new club that's coming and I'd like to perform, of course, more than one day a week, but I've been a part of shows where it was two shows a night, six nights a week. Then it was just weekend clubs when I toured back in the day... Now that I'm older and tired, I'd rather have my own club here. I'm in my city so, I don't have to travel as often. You know, 2-3 times a week is my usual.

Interviewer: Where do you regularly perform?

Rachel Michaels: Well, at this time we don't have a local club. I've been doing the regional clubs since August - we closed back in August at ShowTime. I've done up at Carbondale and Cape Girardeau, I went to Evansville last weekend. But, you know those dates are few and far between. I'm just waiting on the new club here in Paducah - it will be called the River Rose Lounge. It will be located on Broadway in Paducah.

Interviewer: Very nice, so what goes into getting ready for a performance?

Rachel Michaels: Well, from start to finish it means a couple hours, you know, of prep at home. Where you're shavin' everything and you're showerin' and you're pluckin'. And then when you get time for makeup. It's just a full coverage of makeup. Cover Girl doesn't cover boy so (laughs). There is several hours of prep on the day of, but of course there is hours and hours of prep with costuming before and hair-styling. There's a lot of prep that goes into it, more than the audience sees, you know, definitely.

Interviewer: Now do you make your own costumes, or do you buy them?

Rachel Michaels: It's both. My ex-husband of 18 years he was my costume designer and he would design those for me and make them. Since we've split up I've kind of had to rely on myself as far as being creative. I don't have any sewing skills, I have just minor ones. But yeah, I do make some. I buy certain things and alter it. It is just a variety of ways to make costumes.

Interviewer: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Rachel Michaels: Well, for me personally I've done it for so long as a career the hardest thing to do is to make the proper money at doing it. That is the biggest thing. It is just so expensive to do and do it right, of course. And to get the clubs to pay you what you are worth is actually the biggest challenge I face.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country?

Rachel Michaels: Hmm. So, the question is are we unique here? Is that what you're asking?

Interviewer: Yeah! Yeah.

Rachel Michaels: Well, I'm the most unique individual here in Paducah. I'm the most notable. The past twenty years I've gone out and done lookalike shows, been on national TV on Sally Jessy Raphael, I've been featured on KVS12 twice as Reba. I've been written up in the newspaper there I'm in Cape Southeast Missourian. I'm probably the most unique individual here. Not to say the other queens aren't. It's just I've did it more as a career instead of a hobby.

Interviewer: Have you noticed anything different about the places you've been - about the drag scene throughout the country? Have there been any variations?

Rachel Michaels: Oh yeah, there is a great entertainer, her name is Vivika Darko up in Evansville. She has opened my eyes to how extreme you can go. I've had her come perform with us at ShowTime a few times in the past. I'm just noticing a lot of more creativity. A lot of more entertainers that are not just copying other people, they are finding their own look, their own way. That kind of

wasn't the way it was when I grew up. You know, you had your elder queens you followed. You did things like them to learn. It seem like the younger generation has now YouTube and the internet and where we didn't have that back in the early 90s. They are able to be influenced to the whole spectrum of drag. There is YouTube videos of all kinds of drag - to glamour, to the character look, to even the extreme look like Vivika.

Interviewer: How has drag impacted or changed you?

Rachel Michaels: Well, as I've said earlier the most important thing is it has built my confidence as an adult. You know, growing up in Kentucky and being shy. I was ashamed of my sexuality cause I didn't understand it growing up but as I've evolved and I've matured- especially in the gay community. It really has been a huge build to my confidence, my personal confidence.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time as Rachel Michaels, what advice would Rachel give to your younger self?

Rachel Michaels: Speak up more. Make sure you get what you want. Make sure you get what you are worth. And dump that husband of yours (laughs).

Interviewer: I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, can you share about how one or more of your social identities have impacted your drag experience? And this would be like your gender, race, class, religion, sexuality.

Rachel Michaels: I'd have to think about that one. That seems more of an in depth.

Interviewer: It is in depth.

Racheal Michaels: How about we skip that one and we come back to that one.

Interviewer: We'll come back to that one, alright, how do you define drag?

Rachel Michaels: Drag, how do I define drag? Hmm. It is a wide spectrum. If you had asked me 10 years ago I don't think my answer would be the same as today. It's an expression of someone's artistic feelings that is inside them. It can be - these days there are men with beards doing drag. I mean drag make up. There is just so many cross blends now. It's just really a full spectrum anymore.

Interviewer: What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Rachel Michaels: I'd say the most important thing is artistic expression. I think each individual has a reason to be up there. Whether they are just not getting noticed as themselves or if they were born to be an entertainer. I think the foundation is that they are up there, and they are expressing themselves artistically.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual?

Rachel Michaels: It can be. There is so many facets in the drag world that do cover the sexual aspect of it. That is not me. I like to be sexy in certain characters, but it's not really been about sex for me or anything like that. But, you know, it takes many kinds in this business. It is a full spectrum.

Interviewer: You said you would more characterize your drag as comedic?

Rachel Michaels: Yeah, I would say I do like to make fun of myself. I don't take myself too seriously. I try to look my best each and every time, but when I get that microphone I kind of poke, make fun of myself cause I am a dude in a dress you know.

Interviewer: When you are in drag what pro-nouns do you use? Do you use he?

Rachel Michaels: Most of the time we just refer to as ourselves as she. You know, Sophia Diamond even as herself as Joe I still call her Sophia or refer to her as she. It is just one of those family history things, I think.

Interviewer: Yeah. Has drag influenced your sexual and gender identity?

Rachel Michaels: Not for me personally. I mean, I identify as a gay male and I've been sure of that now for 25 years.

Interviewer: How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Rachel Michaels: Oh, you are gonna get me.... I don't watch that show. I don't watch the show. There is nothing wrong with the show. It has brought drag to a national level of acceptance. And I do commend RuPaul and the girls, I do know some of the girls. For me personally, I've dealt with drag queens for 24 years in the dressing rooms and whatnot. I just don't want it broadcasted into my living room.

Interviewer: I think that's fair.

Rachel Michaels: Hey, I'm all for it. It is just something I haven't done, and what it has done for me as a celebrity impersonator it has knocked certain types of entertainers downhill because the RuPaul Drag Queens are the most sought after right now because of the national exposure. Which is great but on the flip side, it has pushed some of us down where they are not going to pay what we are worth. So, we kind of battle with the bookings.

Interviewer: Right, that is an interesting perspective to have because we don't get to hear a lot from that because you are turned more towards the RuPaul Drag Queens.

Rachel Michaels: You know, I've worked with Chad Michaels on a few shows. We are personal friends and all. I've worked with a few others, of course Chad is my favorite anyway. He does the greatest Cher in the world - if you ask me. And I'm the best Reba in the world so there we go. But, no. That is my, where I stand with RuPaul. I'm okay with it. At first, I was a little bitter, but as the years have gone on and my life has changed, I see the good things from it. But, on a professional level we are battling for money.

Interviewer: If you could change on thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community what would it be or why?

Rachel Michaels: I would change the type of club owners. We need a new generation of club owners who sees the value in each and every entertainer because we have too many clubs that have been established, and you know it is wonderful, that they have done great things for the community,

but when it comes down to the drag queens they try to get each queen as cheap as possible. I think that's just wrong. They are making money off our backs. You know, if the show wasn't there would they come in just for the ambiance they've created and the cocktails the bartenders serving? A lot of people show up for the shows. I feel they take advantage of us because it costs a lot of money to look like that. I wish, and we do have here in Paducah, we've got a lesbian couple that is going to treat us wonderfully. I would just change the mentality of the current bar owners or we need a new generation who appreciates what we do.

Interviewer: What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag?

Rachel Michaels: That we want to be a woman. I hate the word transvestite. They all have these certain ideals that we are immoral. That is stemming from being in a rural area basically, but on the flip side of that there are the ones who admire what we do and see what we do, and they find it purely entertaining.

Interviewer: What do you think help change those misconceptions?

Rachel Michaels: Uhm... actually coming to see a show. Taking the time and talk to me for five minutes and I'll change your mind immediately. When I lived in Saxton, Missouri, we didn't have a gay bar over there. I lived there for 12 years with my ex-husband. And I got tired of these gay bars in the area not paying me my worth so, I went up and did my own show at a redneck country bar and it went over extremely well. It was just taking the time to talk to me and see hey, that dude ain't half bad. He is no freak, he's no degenerate, or pervert. It's just the way it is.

Interviewer: If you chose, one thing you want people to learn about or from drag what would it be?

Rachel Michaels: Express yourself that is really what it's about. Finding your own identity and it is good to admire others and for a period of time to get started. But, I would suggest they look deep inside themselves and find that inner character that they want to do. Be independent, be yourself, do what you want to do. Learn from your mistakes, learn from your triumphs - that is what makes a good entertainer.

Interviewer: Absolutely, well that was actually my last question, we can come back to the in-depth question if you'd like or we can skip it, that's up to you.

Rachel Michaels: You're going to have to ask me that one again because I'm going to have to think about that one.

Interviewer: Alright, and you can e-mail your answer to me if you'd like.

Rachel Michaels: If you don't mind sending me that on messenger and I'll send you my answer to that one.

Interviewer: Alright, I can do that. Well thank you so much for your time this is very helpful to our research.

Rachel Michaels: You're welcome and I just thank you for inviting me to do this and just let me know when it comes out and we'll give it a look.

Interviewer: Okay, for sure I will be in touch, okay?

Rachel Michaels: Okay Emily, thank you.

Interview with Regina Steelheart

To cite this interview please use the following:

Temko, Ezra. 2020. Student interview with Regina Steelheart, *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, May 4, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/drag-artist-portrait/regina-steelheart/>

Interviewer: So, thank you for coming to me and letting me interview you. When do you first hear about drag?

Regina Steelheart: Uh, I first started hearing about drag my junior year of high school. I was just really bored in the library because I had a lot of time. I was flipping through videos on my YouTube and I saw RuPaul's Drag Race and I was like, "What is this?" And so, I started watching it and I was like, this is an amazing show and I want to know more about it. So, I watched every single season that was on YouTube until like, and then I was watching every season on cable and I was like, I don't know, obsessed.

Interviewer: Yeah. What season did you first see?

Regina Steelheart: The first season that I saw, I kinda went backwards a little bit. I saw Season 3 and so, 2, 1 and then I saw the rest in order.

Interviewer: What was your initial reaction? You said you loved RuPaul's Drag Race, so did you look any further into anything after that?

Regina Steelheart: I didn't really look much into like, the logistics of the show. I just knew that guys were dressing up as women and they were having these funny competitions like, I was like, "Man I kind of want to see more about this lifestyle." And then whenever I got older, I started going to more drag shows in person. So I was like, I didn't know there was like this entire world of like entertainers that do this kind of stuff and I was hooked.

Interviewer: Yeah, I understand that. When did you start performing as a drag artist?

Regina Steelheart: I started performing, I've actually not been performing too long. It's been since like, December.

Interviewer: Really? So, it's like, fresh for you?

Regina Steelheart: Oh yeah, it's very fresh.

Interviewer: Why'd you start performing?

Regina Steelheart: I started because, my friend, he's been doing it for so long. He's actually my drag mom now.

Interviewer: Oh, that's awesome!

Regina Steelheart: And I was like, looking at all of the performances and he was inviting me to all of his shows, and I was like, okay I'll definitely come. And the more I kept on watching I was like, man I kind of want to do this. Plus, the tips, you make bank.

Interviewer: Really? I did notice that a little bit at Attitudes. So, does your drag mom perform at Attitudes quite a bit?

Regina Steelheart: She performs every Young and Reckless.

Interviewer: Oh! That's the one I saw!

Regina Steelheart: Yes! It's the one where young and up and coming artists like for drag perform their stuff once a month. And so, he's been doing it for a little over a year now.

Interviewer: That's pretty cool! So how did your family, friends, any other loved ones react or receive you becoming a drag artist?

Regina Steelheart: They were kinda surprised but not too surprised. They were like, hmm that seems like something you would do. And so, my family has always been super supportive about my lifestyle so like whenever I told them, "I'm gonna start doing drag!" They were like, okay sweetie, have fun.

Interviewer: That's awesome! So where does your drag name come from?

Regina Steelheart: So, I also take pole dancing lessons. And, so, I have this instructor and her name is Regina. Whenever I took Latin in high school, Regina is actually pronounced "Rey-gee-na" in Latin for "queen" and I was like, okay I'll just be queen. And then I kept on going through last names like, Regina Frost, Regina Fay, and I was like, none of these are sticking. My drag mom, Luna Steelheart, she was like, "Just take my last name." And I was like, "Regina Steelheart", queen of stealing hearts, that sounds pretty nice.

Interviewer: That's awesome! So, there's a lot of terms and styles of drag. Are you pretty familiar with all of them? There's a couple of examples here: drag queen, drag king, glamour king, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen, and camp queen.

Regina Steelheart: There's a lot!

Interviewer: Yeah! And there's more than that. So, are there any particular labels that you would characterize the drag that you've done since December?

Regina Steelheart: Uhm, I like to consider myself a dancing queen because whenever I put on performance, I like to make sure that I'm hitting every single move, that I'm making the audience, not just see me lip syncing and walking down the stage, I wanna like put on a performance like, put a dance with it.

Interviewer: So that's kind of the drag that you do is dancing queen? Because that is the next question. So, what kind of drag do you do? The dancing?

Regina Steelheart: The dancing, the lip syncing, and do the reveals.

Interviewer: Oh, okay! What is your style of drag, like what do you go for?

Regina Steelheart: My style, I try to be a little glam. I like to wear the short dresses, like to wear the jewelry. I just want to make sure that people notice me.

Interviewer: The one at Attitudes was very shiny and was very nice! So, does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist?

Regina Steelheart: Uhh, it doesn't really affect me too much. It does take a couple times out of my day, to like, because I gotta learn the steps in heels. Heels are the bitch! And then doing makeup is definitely one of the hardest parts because you have to get everything precise to make yourself look like a biological woman. Or make it look like, campy.

Interviewer: So, who or what has influenced you to do drag?

Regina Steelheart: Well definitely RuPaul's Drag Race, my drag mom, and then there's been some other drag queens that have taught me a few things and shown me what to do. Like Bella Russian, Lola Control, Chloe Curiosity they're all the Young and Reckless kinda girls. They've all taught me, like, what to do with my hair, what to do with my eyebrows, how I should be dancing. And I'm like, they've helped me so much and they've influenced me so much within the drag world.

Interviewer: That's awesome. Do you consider your drag political?

Regina Steelheart: No.

Interviewer: We've had a couple readings about drag and politics so that's one of our questions.

Regina Steelheart: Yeah, I just like drag as being like a statement of having fun and being who you are and no matter what you do for your life, you're just gonna enjoy it.

Interviewer: So, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? So, are you part of a drag family, house?

Regina Steelheart: I am part of a drag family house. We are part of the Steelheart family. Luna Steelheart, me Regina Steelheart, and my adopted drag sister Lucinda Sheets.

Interviewer: What was that?

Regina Steelheart: Lucinda Sheets. She's making a pun like "Loose in the Sheets."

Interviewer: Yeah, I got that after you said it the second time I was like, oh okay.

Regina Steelheart: And then my drag mom, she also has a mother but she's not a part of the family because she's already a part of her own family. Veronica Mitchell.

Interviewer: So, you said you started in December, so how often have you performed since then?

Regina Steelheart: I've performed every month since December.

Interviewer: Awesome. And then do you do it at Attitudes?

Regina Steelheart: I do. That's the only place I've been doing it. I've been a little more busy with my other job. So, whenever I start getting better at it, I'm going to start performing at other show places.

Interviewer: That's cool. So, we kinda already answered that one, it was where do you perform, and you said Attitudes, where else do you think after Attitudes you would want to start performing?

Regina Steelheart: Possibly Hamburger Mary's, it's a place downtown, that's a great place. Rehab would be pretty cool. Uhh, and there's a few other places that my drag friends have told me about but I kinda forgot about them.

Interviewer: Okay, so what goes into getting ready for your performance?

Regina Steelheart: It's definitely time consuming because like, you have to be at the show at 9:30 and it starts at 10:30. So you have to start getting your makeup ready by like 1 or 3. So you're doing your makeup for close to 7 hours. And then you're, if you're wanting to be a curvy queen, you've got the padding, and you've got the cinchers and the corsets.

Interviewer: That's definitely like, Nina Bo'nina Brown energy right there.

Regina Steelheart: Yes! And then you have your bras and your breast plates and your breast that you just stick on with some glue. Then you got the outfits, you got the wigs, that's like 10 minutes out of your time, too. You got the heels, you got the drive there, which is like 10 minutes out of my way. And then you, whenever you get there, you put on the final touches. You walk around and get the dance moves ready that you want to do. It's a lot of time.

Interviewer: Yeah so basically it starts early afternoon and then all the way through the show.

Regina Steelheart: Exactly!

Interviewer: That's a long day. So, what are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist that you face so far?

Regina Steelheart: Cost!

Interviewer: Really?

Regina Steelheart: Because if you want to be a good drag queen, everything on your face alone, will cost \$100. And then the clothes, if you want to look really good, that's another \$150-200. The wigs are also, if you want a good wig, like one with 50% real hair, that's like \$150-200. And sometimes my job doesn't really offer too much money and I'm also saving some money for the side for other stuff. So, if I'm wanting to spend, I have to make sure that I have the exact amount of money and that I'm dead set on what I want to wear and for our performance that's coming up.

Interviewer: So it's a lot of thinking and processing before it even happens.

Regina Steelheart: Oh yeah, you have to think about the song that you want to do. You have to think about what dance moves you're gonna do with it. If you wanna do any reveals, how high your heels are gonna be. I've worn 6-inch heels on that stage and that was a bitch.

Interviewer: I can't even imagine. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world? Do you know?

Regina Steelheart: Uh, I think my general area for being at Attitudes is that it allows like, the young people to experience it more, because RuPaul's Drag Race has influenced so many young people to start doing drag so like, many people have been starting drag early. And so, they wanted a place where they could perform and show off their stuff and I feel like this place allows young, gay men or lesbians to be drag queens and drag kings and show off who they are.

Interviewer: It's kind of a good start.

Regina Steelheart: Yeah, it's a good start definitely.

Interviewer: So how do you identify in terms of sex, gender, identity and gender expression out of drag?

Regina Steelheart: Out of drag I am my same male self.

Interviewer: What pronouns do you use in and out of drag? So out of drag it'd be..

Regina Steelheart: Out of drag I am he/him/his. And in drag, you can still call me he, it doesn't matter, but most of the time you can call me she.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities?

Regina Steelheart: It has not. I'm still into girls, I'm still into dudes. Whenever I do drag, I'm a different person sometimes. Like, I have to put on a show so I have to put up a character. But out of drag, I am the same person.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced how you think about gender?

Regina Steelheart: I do believe that it is a good transitioning time for some queens that are like, not sure about who they really are. Like, some queens like Gia Gunn and Peppermint, they've been transitioning from man to woman and that's like, a good start for them. Because they're like, I feel more natural in my drag state than I feel as a boy.

Interviewer: Have your sex or gender identities influenced your drag?

Regina Steelheart: I don't think so.

Interviewer: How has drag impacted or changed you since you've started?

Regina Steelheart: Uhh, I definitely have so much more respect for them than just being performers because the pain that you gotta go through was like, you're gonna be ridiculed sometimes because some people aren't gonna understand. You got the pain from the cinching, the tucking, and the wearing the heels. And I just think that a lot of time and effort goes into this and it's just like, there's so much more respect for them now.

Interviewer: Yeah, I understand that. And then, has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Regina Steelheart: Not really. I've always been a pretty confident person. I've always been, yeah, I'm just pretty confident.

Interviewer: So, it just kinda like builds that up a little bit more?

Regina Steelheart: Yeah, just a little bit.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time as Regina, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Regina Steelheart: Get a better wig for your first performance. God, that was awful.

Interviewer: What happened?

Regina Steelheart: I got this like long 26-inch hair and it was just like flopping in front my face because it wasn't natural hair, I didn't hairspray it. So I tried lip synching to Can't Be Tamed by Miley Cyrus and all you see is nothing.

Interviewer: Just the hair everywhere!

Regina Steelheart: Just the hair everywhere. I couldn't get rid of it!

Interviewer: So social identities involve like, your gender, your race, class, age, all of that stuff. So, have your social identities impacted your experience of drag or has drag impacted any of that?

Regina Steelheart: Not that I can recall.

Interviewer: So now we're kinda getting into your ideas about drag so there's a few more questions on that. The first one is how do you define drag?

Regina Steelheart: I define drag as an art form. I see it as a way for people to express who they are, what they want to be, and to put on a show for as many people as they can and to show off their talents. Like, you're gonna be the dancing, you're gonna be the singing, or you're gonna be the odd ball out and put on the weirdest performance but getting everybody riled up. And you're gonna love it.

Interviewer: So, what do you think the purpose of drag is?

Regina Steelheart: I feel like the purpose of drag is a lot of people, especially within gay culture, to express themselves and find out who they are like, internally.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual?

Regina Steelheart: It can be. There's some drag queens that do burlesque, other queens bring dildos on stage, it's interesting. Or they have like, sexual dances but sometimes it's mostly about having a good time and if things get sexy, I guess that's the audiences like, favor.

Interviewer: What kind of style is burlesque? I've seen a movie.

Regina Steelheart: Oh, Burlesque with Christina Aguilera? Burlesque is a sexual art form of dancing. It is a form of you taking off your clothes and dancing provocatively, you don't have to lip synch or anything, that's what the movie did. But yeah, it's just like being very sexual and you don't

strip down everything, but you do show a little bit of ass, you got the little pasties on. It's pretty cool.

Interviewer: Have you seen any performances like that?

Regina Steelheart: Oh yeah!

Interviewer: So how do, I mean we've already talked RuPaul's drag race and that's kinda how you started with drag and you kinda explained it a little bit but if you want to go into more detail like, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Regina Steelheart: I love RuPaul's Drag Race. Whenever I was first watching it, I was like, "I don't understand what this is", but then as I got more into the show I was like, this is so cool because it's showing that you don't have to be everything to be a great queen. Like, you can be comedy, you can be artsy, you can be dancing. It shows a whole bunch of queens that you don't have to be defined by one thing or a lot of things. And then the comedy is a lot, it's really funny. This season, the comedy has been a little bit off because Silky Nutmeg Ganache, she's wild. She needs to go home.

Interviewer: I'm not familiar with that. It does seem like the show offers a lot for drag artists.

Regina Steelheart: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would want to add about like certain aspects of it or anything?

Regina Steelheart: The show, the queens do wear a lot of pricey objects and try and make themselves look really good. But what we have to understand is that these queens have been performing for so long, and they have connections to so many people and that drag can be pricey, but you don't have to be spending \$3000 on one single dress. You can still look great and still be on a budget.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, the drag community, what would it be?

Regina Steelheart: Nothing at all.

Interviewer: Really? Why's that?

Regina Steelheart: It's fine just the way it is. You gotta just like, look into the world and be like, all of these people are putting their souls out onto the dance floor and onto the red carpet and you just have to respect what they do and it's an amazing time if you ever go to a show.

Interviewer: Attitudes is actually the only one I've actually gone to, so it was really fun.

Regina Steelheart: You've gotta go to more.

Interviewer: I know, I want to. Hamburger Mary's is the next stop.

Regina Steelheart: If you go on Thursday's, they have weekly RuPaul showings and after the shows they'll have the drag shows themselves.

Interviewer: That's pretty cool. What do you think the misconceptions people have about drag?

Regina Steelheart: That it's mostly about either men just wanting to wear women's clothing or it's just that men don't know who they are and they want to transition into a woman someday. That's not what it is. Some men are just comfortable wearing, expressing more than just masculinity and not all men that do drag want to become women someday. They just want to put on a show for as many people as they can and look good doing it.

Interviewer: What do you think would help change people's minds about those misconceptions?

Regina Steelheart: If people stop being bigots.

Interviewer: If you chose one thing that you wanted people to know or learn about drag, what would it be?

Regina Steelheart: Like I said, be respectful and learn that these queens can be on a budget, they can be high or low and that no matter what they do, still clap for them, still be respectful for them, still give them a dollar because they work hard.

Interviewer: Did you want to add anything else, any questions or anything?

Regina Steelheart: I think I'm good.

Interviewer: Well thank you so much for coming here and interviewing with me. It's been fun learning about your insights on drag and everything.

Regina Steelheart: No problem, I'm glad I could experience this with you. And I'm glad I know there's a class about this at our school that I'm probably gonna take some time!

Interview with Roxxy Malone

To cite this interview please use the following:

Kaminski, Devon. 2020. Interview with Roxxy Malone. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 11, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/roxy-m-malone/>

Interviewer: Hello!

Roxxy Malone: Hello! Is this Devon?

Interviewer: Yes it is! How're you today!

Roxxy Malone: I am well, thank you!

Interviewer: Okay one second. Okay, this is being recorded, are you okay with that?

Roxxy Malone: Oh, absolutely!

Interviewer: Awesome. So, thank you so much for letting me bug you for this interview.

Roxxy Malone: No problem, it'll be fun.

Interviewer: Hopefully! So, we went through, and we got some questions set up here. So, we're gonna start with a little personal bit of history here, it's like your artist personal history with drag. So, one of the first questions I have here is when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Roxxy Malone: So, the first time I was ever really exposed to it was probably like my senior year of high school which would have been 2010. I watched a show called RuPaul's Drag Race. I found it on accident actually, I didn't know what it was. But I started watching it and that was like my big first exposure to it and then from there it was just mainly watching that show and getting more invested in it and then one day I just decided I was going to take the plunge and do it myself.

Interviewer: That's awesome! So like, 2010? What season of RuPaul's Drag Race was it, do you remember?

Roxxy Malone: Oh, season one, terrible season, terrible.

Interviewer: I think they call that the lost season! I love it! So, you found it in 2010, so when did you start performing as a drag artist, like what made you want to start performing?

Roxxy Malone: So, I started in like 2015, yeah 2015. So, I've always been a performer like through high school and even in college, I taught and was a part of the color guard team at my high school and so like I've always been very theatrical based, very performer based already so it was kind of the want and need for attention and stage time again. And then as far as drag went, that was kind of

like a solo chance for myself I guess you could say, to where it was even more about me. When they tell you drag queens are vain, they're not lying. So, from there I did one show and I was like "You know what, we're gonna fully invest in it, let's do it!" and here we are.

Interviewer: Oh, that's awesome! Do you remember when your first show was?

Roxy Malone: It was! It was July 3rd, 2015.

Interviewer: So, was it like a 4th of July show kind of thing?

Roxy Malone: No, so it was actually like a newcomer show, that was my first jump in.

Interviewer: Do you remember, if you feel like sharing, how did your family and friends react to you becoming a drag artist? Did they think it was like a one-time thing or did you tell them it was the real deal?

Roxy Malone: So, my parents actually just found out about three months ago. So, I kind of hid it from them. My parents have always been super supportive of any decision or like me in general, but it was one of those like, do I want to try and tip the iceberg and let them know this now so I always kind of kept this from them, but now that they know they're super supportive. They're like as long as you're happy and you're not like out there getting arrested and, you know, causing major harm and all that kind of stuff, like you're keeping out of trouble doing this and you seem to be happy and you love doing this, plus you're good at it and ya make money doing it. So, like they basically told me they have no reason not to support it.

Interviewer: That's awesome! That's really good to hear. I like that.

Roxy Malone: It was a very big weight lifted off my shoulders to hear it.

Interviewer: I'm sure! So, you hid it for a very long time, I guess now you can really, really embrace it! Do they come to any of your shows?

Roxy Malone: So actually, that's how I found out my mom knew. She showed up to one and I was not prepared for it. So, my cousin, one of my cousins has been very adamant, like she's known for a while. She was the cousin I told everything to. She was like you know what, your parents are gonna love this because I know that they love you for who you are, and I was like yeah, they probably would but like I'm not ready. Well she decided to take it upon herself and say I think you're ready and brought her to one without me knowing and it kind of opened that door to where now it's like you know I was ready. But I had doubted it myself.

Interviewer: That was probably pretty intimidating at first but I'm really glad to hear that it went well.

Roxy Malone: Yeah, it could have went real bad. But it didn't.

Interviewer: That's good. So, another question I have here is where did your drag name come from?

Roxy Malone: So, when I first started, I thought I was going to try and be really funny and like a comedy kind of person. So, my first drag name ever was Roxy Moron cause it's like a play on words, get it.

Interviewer: Oh yeah!

Roxy Malone: But whenever I dove into what kind of drag artist do I wanna be, that didn't fit the persona that I wanted. So, I kept my first name, which is Roxy, that's always been like the name of choice for me and then my last name, Malone, came from one of my favorite movies called Showgirls, that's the girls last name.

Interviewer: Nice! That's a good one. There's a lot of people that use names that they've put together from inspirations like movies and stuff like that. It's really cool to hear that people are drawing from things that mean something to them.

Roxy Malone: Yep!

Interviewer: So, it sounds like you started talking about your style of drag. There's a lot of different terms, or types and styles, from glamour queens, male impersonators, comedy queens, stuff like that. What would you describe your style of drag as being?

Roxy Malone: So, the number one thing I claim myself to be is a pageant girl. So, I'm a pageant queen, that's what I do. But I also don't limit myself. So, a pageant queen is what I am, that's what I do for like "a living" I guess you could say but I can do comedy, I can do everything else. I may not be 100% solid in it like I am pageant wise, but I can do it. But if I had to say one, I'm a pageant girl, that's it, fully.

Interviewer: I've seen some Facebook pictures and it looks like you're in the middle of pageant season?

Roxy Malone: It actually just ended.

Interviewer: How'd you do?

Roxy Malone: So, this year I placed 4th overall in the state of Missouri, which is super good. Out of 18 contestants, 56 tried to qualify, 18 qualified, and I was 4th.

Interviewer: That's amazing! Congratulations!

Roxy Malone: Thank you. It was my first year making top 10 and the top 5. So I've competed for three years. In 2017 I was the Miss Gay Northwest, 2018 I was Miss Gay River City, and this year for 2019, I was Miss Gay Gateway, so my pageant success I guess you could call it was my first two years I placed 13th overall and then this year I cracked the top 10 and the top 5 by getting 4th.

Interviewer: That's amazing, I bet, that's awesome, congratulations!

Roxy Malone: Thank you! Not cheap. Not cheap at all!

Interviewer: Not cheap at all? There was a question in here about how much does drag cost and some people didn't want to ask that question because they felt like it might be a little bit too prying which I can understand since you're getting into personal finances and what not. But, you know, since pageantry is expensive on its own do you have a second job to help fund your drag or is drag your full time job?

Roxy Malone: So, I do have a full-time job but I don't use that as a means to pay for drag anymore. So, in the beginning you have to, it's like starting up a business. You have to invest money to make money kind of a thing. But now, thankfully, I work almost... well no not even. I work every weekend in drag. So it's like my second job, but it fully pays for itself now.

Interviewer: That's awesome! So where do you do shows mostly?

Roxy Malone: So, it's all basically in St. Louis, that's where I'm based. But I've been in the Bastille in Soulard, I'm going down the days of the week just so I can remember. On Tuesdays, so Mondays I'm usually at the Soulard Bastille, Tuesday's I'm at the Grey Fox Pub where I host my own show called C.U. Next Tuesday, Wednesdays I bounce between either Bubby and Sissy's in Alton or Rehab Bar & Grill in The Grove, Thursdays sometimes I'm at Grey Fox for their what's called discovery night which is like an up and coming night, I'll either mentor or I'll host it, Friday, is kind of like the depending where I'm at, I've been at the St. Charles at this bar called Leo's pub and grill, Bubby and Sissy's, Rehab, no not Rehab, sorry, Grey Fox. Grey Fox is like my home bar. Saturday typically I'm at Grey Fox, I'm on cast there for Saturdays. Sundays, like bar PM or I've been at Hamburger Mary's for the Sunday night showcase so it just kind of depends, but I've been everywhere in the city.

Interviewer: That's awesome. So, you get to do a little bit of traveling doing what you love kind of a thing?

Roxy Malone: Oh yeah, it's great. Sometimes. It's exhausting.

Interviewer: So, another question we have here is you said it was exhausting. So, what is your life like as a drag artist, kind of a day to day kind of a thing.

Roxy Malone: So, a typical show day... I work a 40-hour job on top of it. So that's like my main focus I guess you could say cause you gotta pay rent and you gotta live, but sometimes like as soon as I get off work like I'll start getting ready. Do the show, go home, de-drag, reset myself, go to bed, wake up for work the next day. So, like me, I'm constantly doing something, but I chose that life for myself so I can't really complain about it too much.

Interviewer: So, is drag like your down time pretty much? So, you like doing it, but it's like more of a relaxing job?

Roxy Malone: Yeah! It's more like therapy at this point. It's a chance for me to kind of be myself and it is like a second job, but I love it, so I don't necessarily constitute it as a job.

Interviewer: They say if you do what you love then you never work a day in your life.

Roxy Malone: Fully.

Interviewer: So, it sounds like you've been doing drag for a minute now. Are you part of a drag family? Like a house or a collective?

Roxy Malone: So, I am now. I actually just got adopted last July. Her name, the mother of the house, her name is Alicia Markstone. She's actually from Missouri, then she moved to Florida, and now she's back. But she is a legend all over the country which is really like kind of nerve wracking to

be a part of because you kind of have to like, set your expectations to live up to that. But she has been like a reigning national title holder of Miss Gay US of A at large, that's like her national title that she's gotten. She's also a seamstress so she sews for people, like especially pageant people, all over the world.

Interviewer: That's awesome. So as the drag mother, is she helping you guys out since she's back?

Roxy Malone: Yep. She pushes us harder than anybody I've ever met. So, whenever she adopted me, I was kind of plateauing in my persona where I was just kind of accepting what I was, accepting what I was doing, cause it was working. But when she adopted me, she said that's mediocre to me, and if you're going to be a part of this family like you are, you're going to improve yourself every step of the way. So it's very hard to hear because every artist is kind sensitive in their own right because it's their art and it's how people view it but I can say now like yeah it was very difficult to hear in the beginning but I needed to hear it because it propelled me to where I'm at now. So last year I was only working maybe only once or twice a week and I would say now I'm working 4 or 5 days a week in drag alone.

Interviewer: So, she's pushing you to become better.

Roxy Malone: Yep.

Interviewer: Hello?

Roxy Malone: Sorry! I didn't know my phone was that low!

Interviewer: All good, all good. It happens all the time actually. So, we were talking about how your family was pushing you, your drag family, to do better and kind of renewing your love for your art.

Roxy Malone: Yep.

Interviewer: That's awesome. So, we talked about where you performed. So, what goes into getting ready for a performance kind of thing?

Roxy Malone: So I always say... I have a drag child as well... but I always tell my child any time you wanna get in drag you have to shower. I don't care if you showered at the beginning of your day and you think you're clean, you must shower because when you're under all of those tights, all of those pads, all of that makeup, all of everything, it's gonna make you even more sweaty than you ever thought you'd be. So, if you have a good clean base underneath, you're not gonna smell funky. That's what I tell everyone though. That's step one. Always shower before you get in drag, I don't care what your day looks like, you must shower. Two, typical, I shave my face. I only shave half of my chest because that's the only part of the body anyone sees, I know that's probably a little bit too much information, but it is what it is. Next, I start painting my face. So, I can take upwards of 45, no I wouldn't say that... like an hour, hour and 15 minutes to max of two hours to paint my face. It just depends on what I'm doing and like how I'm feeling that day. So, like full time for getting ready so like makeup, hair, nails, and then body costume would be two hours total.

Interviewer: That doesn't sound too bad!

Roxy Malone: No, not really. You get faster at it as you go. Like in the beginning, most people start getting ready like SUPER early. But that makes sense for them, they want to take their time, they want to make sure everything is right. But as you start to know yourself and how fast you can get into body, know how long it takes you to style hair on your head, how to put make up on, all that kind of stuff, you get fast. It's almost like girls getting ready in the morning. It's just that on a more extended scale.

Interviewer: I feel that! Very relatable!

Roxy Malone: Like let's say you're thirteen years old, just now getting into makeup, I don't know what age girls usually get into makeup anymore. But you're kind of slow at it, you take your time but then like say you're in college and it's finals week, five minutes and you're out the door.

Interviewer: You are so right.

Roxy Malone: You just know what to do, you know what's gonna make it look right for the day. It's the same thing.

Interviewer: So, you're really good at getting ready and of course you're mentoring someone else so what're the biggest challenges of doing drag and being a drag artist?

Roxy Malone: As cliché as it sounds, it's really like finding yourself. It's really easy in drag to try and mold yourself to what you think people want. A lot of newer girls do that because they want to start working right away, like they want that validation that what they're doing is right and I fell into that too. But it's really... you have to find yourself and what makes you special because they're going to book you, or whoever, but because you're different and because you bring something different to the table, not because you copied little Suzy down the street. They don't care. They can find anybody that can do that. But finding yourself and finding what makes you special is gonna which is gonna make you different and that's more bookable.

Interviewer: That makes sense. So, trying to find yourself is kind of the hardest part?

Roxy Malone: Yep. Fully. We live in a world now where social media is a huge aspect to everybody's life, so you see a lot of other people doing things that work for them, but it's finding what works for you is the hard part. But like I said if you can find what works for you it's not gonna work for anyone else that same way.

Interviewer: So, I guess I probably should have asked this in the beginning, but what pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Roxy Malone: So, in drag, I use she. That's kind of like, that's me, I'm a drag queen. Out of drag, this is the confusing part that always throws everybody for a loop. So out of drag, I'm a boy. A hundred percent. Like I identify as a man, but in the drag community we don't go by or necessarily talk as if we're boys. We talk as if we're still in drag. So, a lot of people don't know my boy name, but they know my stage name so it's very much that. And for me it doesn't bother me as much because I know how I identify out of drag and we know each other as drag friends.

Yes, we're friends outside of drag but that's just kind of how it works, I guess. Now some performers don't like that like, they'll say I'm a boy out of drag, please respect that, and that's fine but just for me it doesn't bother me.

Interviewer: That makes sense. So, it sounds like you're pretty comfortable, how has drag impacted your confidence as a person?

Roxy Malone: Yes, a hundred percent. So, in the pageant system that I run for, I run for the Miss Gay America system and their tag line is "boys will be boys, and female impersonation is an art" which is beautiful, like that's cool but me as a boy is not confident. You'll find me kind of sitting in the corner like not talking to many people except for the people that I already know, but in drag I am untouchable. That's how I feel. Like as soon as I put everything on, that's my armor. Nobody can touch me, nobody can say anything that's gonna like, hurt me because that's my armor. I can't explain how it works but it's just my suit of armor. I could speak to *anybody* in drag, but you put me in front of people as a boy and I'm the most timid person you'll ever meet.

Interviewer: Well that's good! It sounds like it really helped you find comfort and security in who you are. So, has drag influenced your sex and gender identity?

Roxy Malone: Hmm, Nope!

Interviewer: Has it influenced how you think of gender as a whole?

Roxy Malone: Yes. So, when I first started drag, I did not understand how the T in LGBT, which is trans, how it worked. I didn't understand it, I thought it was just people in drag, like you were in drag you were trans, that's how I thought it was. But that's not the case. You learn a lot about people doing drag itself. So, I have a lot of people that I'm close with that identify as nonbinary, they don't go by either gender and for me it's just getting to know them on a different level and me being able to understand it. Because you're not... nobody is exposed to that on a regular day to day basis. Like people don't just walk around and say, "hey this is how I identify," that's not how it works. Because it's all safety for them, they want to make sure they're safe and secure and I'm all for it. Like I'm not gonna go tell everyone that I do drag all the time, like you don't know what's out there, you don't know how people are gonna react.

Interviewer: That's true.

Roxy Malone: It's sad to say that we live in a scary world where you don't know what's gonna happen in five minutes.

Interviewer: That is very true. Oh, I had something... So you said it's a bit of a scary world out there... and knowing what you know about drag now, if you could go back in time, like as Roxy, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Roxy Malone: So, when they ask us this question in interview every year for the pageant system, like what would you tell to your younger self, my answer never changes. It's always like you need to celebrate who you are now because it's gonna make you happier down the road later and even if people don't understand you, it's not their right to understand you.

Interviewer: I like that. So we're moving into some questions about how you feel about drag in general... is there anything you feel like I missed? Is there anything that you want to get out there to other people who might find this interview?

Roxy Malone: Yeah! So, everybody... well I don't want to say everybody cause that's too general I guess, but drag is now mainstream with RuPaul's Drag Race, it's very mainstream. Everybody knows who, well not like everybody, I can't say everybody, a lot of people know what drag is based on a TV show and that's not the case. What you see on tv is not what you see in real life. So, if you enjoy what you see on RuPaul's Drag Race, go out to a bar and actually see it for yourself because you'll probably fall in love with it even more. RuPaul's Drag Race is not local drag, that's not what drag really at its core is. That's kind of it. If you love RuPaul's Drag Race and you love drag based on that, go support those local girls who are actually doing it on a day to day basis and not getting paid like thousands of dollars to show up at a bar for an hour.

Interviewer: True. So, it seems like you kind of answered a few of these other questions, like, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race kind of thing.

Roxy Malone: I love it! My on-stage question this year was how has RuPaul's Drag Race, Will and Grace, and How I Met Your Mother I think it was, has it effected the LGBTQ+ community in a positive or negative light. My answer is simple. We all have to start somewhere. There has to be some kind of introduction to what everything is so those three things I personally feel that it's been a positive thing because without it you're starting with nothing, you don't even know what's out there. It's like Drag 101.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. So, if you could change one thing about the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be?

Roxy Malone: To include all styles. St. Louis has a really big opportunity with that to where most venues and even performers are segregated by what kind of drag they do and it's honestly the *biggest* annoyance of my life. Because at the end of the day, we all do drag, like it's just drag. Granted we all do different parts of drag and different aesthetics of drag but at the end of the day, the makeup comes off and we're still human.

Interviewer: I like that a lot. So, like you said, people are watching RuPaul's Drag Race and are getting like a false image or idea of what they think drag is. What do you think some of the misconceptions are that people have about drag?

Roxy Malone: Like it's a very film art... Like you see very minimal representation of drag, like good... or not good, I don't wanna say good drag, because like they gave good drag because they have money for it. But you get, a lot of these girls on the show don't act like that in real life. You get like a sense of a false storyline. As of, let me think of one girl in particular, I'll just compare the two. So she's on season I think they're on season 11 now... her name is Vanessa Vanjie Mateo and if you look at her from the season she's on now to last season when she was on, you can totally tell she was scripted because you don't know who *she* is. She's playing two different characters on two different seasons so like right there to me, you can tell it's scripted. You don't

really get to know them as a person necessarily. You get to know them as what did the show want. They'll tell you all day that the show is not scripted but you can tell that it is.

Interviewer: Yeah, I kind of have to agree there.

Roxy Malone: And it's not RuPaul's Drag Race, it's every kind of reality TV show. You can tell it's scripted. They already know what they want when they cast you.

Interviewer: Yeah again I kind of have to agree there.

Roxy Malone: But you know when you see promos out you know who's gonna be that sassy, problematic, excuse my language, bitch... you know looking at them because of how they portray them. You know who's gonna be innocent and just sit in the corner. They show you it. Like they're not silent about it. But with that if it's your first time around drag and you show that about drag people are gonna believe it because they don't know.

Interviewer: So, what do you think could be done to help change that misconception that people are getting?

Roxy Malone: Really, it's just you see it on TV, go support it in real life.

Interviewer: So that kind of leads into if you could pick on thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would it be?

Roxy Malone: We're human. You know, mistakes happen. There's a lawsuit going on now, with a Hamburger Mary's.. I think it's in Florida.. where the performer touched an individual and the individual is now suing the Hamburger Mary's location because she like broke her nose because she shoved her face into her chest. And it's that kind of headline, and once again it's everywhere, you see a sports team and it's the same thing, they see that this happened and they think all queens are like that. That's not the case, we're all different. We all do different things, we're all different people. Like to put us in one box is like saying that you know, all chips are the same or... all food is the same.

Interviewer: So, drag is like a whole different box inside of a box that you think should be opened up more for everyone? That more people should be open to that experience?

Roxy Malone: Yep. Only if they're comfortable though because not everyone is going to be comfortable with it and it's not our place to say you have to be comfortable with it. Some people just never will be and that's fine, that's them.

Interviewer: I'm curious how drag has impacted your social identity. Can you share how drag has impacted one or more of your social identities such as gender, race, class, things like that?

Roxy Malone: Yeah, so we'll talk about class first. My family has always had money, like not even trying to brag about it, that's just how it was. Both my parents had good jobs and all that kind of stuff... but when you see a lot of these drag artists, you know... they don't have the money for it. You can tell what they invest their money in, we'll say that. And it's fine, it's their art, if they need to put on a \$3,000 dress to feel glamorous, by all means, do it. So, I've noticed that a lot, you can kind of tell somebody's social class, and even economic class based on the kind of drag

that they do. But that doesn't limit to say that someone in a we'll say "lower class" can't be fabulous and glamorous and spend their money because it's all about where you put it. Where you put that money. The extra money or whatever. Lastly like social, I'm more of a social person. Like now, if you would have asked me two years ago to do an interview I would have probably said uh are you sure? But now I'm like let's talk! Let's go!

Interviewer: So, do you think your social or economic class has influenced the type of drag you do?

Roxy Malone: No, I've always wanted to do pageant. I've always kind of wanted to be that glamorous girl, I just didn't know it. And for me I'm the type of person that if I want something, I'm going to work hard enough until I can get it.

Interviewer: That's awesome. So, it looks like I actually made it through all the questions! I know I said I probably wouldn't, but it looks like you answered some of them without me having to ask! I really appreciate it! So, one more time though, is there anything you feel like I missed or that I didn't ask in a good enough way?

Roxy Malone: There's only one last thing I would have to say, and this is advice for not only you, but anyone would listen to this. It's drag is a melting pot of individuals and styles, aesthetics, and people and y'know everything under the sun. So you can appreciate whatever kind of style or you can adore and we'll say "obsess" over and prefer whatever kind of drag you want, I'm not saying you can't, but just know that there is a difference between appreciating somebody and the art that they do and not being rude about it. Like there is not place in this world for somebody to be hateful over what somebody else is doing. We have no room for it. Like you should appreciate whatever kind of drag they do, like you don't have to prefer it.

Interviewer: I agree! I would really like to thank you again for giving me this time and sharing your story with me. I hope to make it out to some of your performances!

Interview with Sabrina White

To cite this interview please use the following:

Temko, Ezra. 2020. Student interview with Sabrina White. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, May 10, 2019.

Audio Available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/drag-artist-portrait/sabrina-white/>

Interviewer: Okay, so thank you for coming and allowing me to interview you.

Sabrina White: My pleasure.

Interviewer: So, I'm going to start with, when did you first hear about drag?

Sabrina White: I first heard about drag in 1992, I had just left college, Berea College in Kentucky and went to Louisville, KY, my very first gay bar, and I saw all these people onstage and I'm like "Oh, I can do that." I thought that they were men in dresses, and they were actually lip synching, not singing live. I was like "Oh, cool." So I did it for Halloween for fun and then I won Most Beautiful at Halloween and then I kept winning pageants after pageant and I've been doing it now, 20-almost 30 years now.

Interviewer: Wow.

Sabrina White: Yeah!

Interviewer: What would you say was your first reaction to drag was, were you kind of like, surprised were you like?

Sabrina White: I was intrigued, I wanted to be on stage I came from a theater background myself, I've been in a lot of the theaters and choirs and stuff so to me being expressive in that way and no one knows who I am is like a bonus.

Interviewer: So, when did you first start performing drag?

Sabrina White: Performing? Probably the year after I first saw a year after I saw my first drag show in 93 in Louisville, Kentucky at the Connection Complex. I did my first amateur night there and I won that.

Interviewer: Really?

Sabrina White: Yeah! My very first one I did Shirley Murdock- In Your Eyes, that was the song I did.

Interviewer: Wow! And you still remember that.

Sabrina White: Yep, I wore a white little chiffon palazzo pants jump suit. I remember everything. I looked horrible, but I had fun doing it.

Interviewer: You had to start somewhere.

Sabrina White: Exactly but I had fun doing it.

Interviewer: So, why did you start performing?

Sabrina White: It was just the chance to be on stage again because after college I actually had a tonsillectomy I lost my voice so I couldn't perform any more on stage and sing anymore so...it was a chance for me to be on stage again without having to sing. Plus I was gay and I liked being on stage, it was a way to meet boys.

Interviewer: So how did your family and friends accept you getting into drag?

Sabrina White: My family actually disowned me when I was 15 years old, so they have no idea what I do now they had no clue. My friends support me 100 percent though, they're always right behind me. It's always good to have good friends behind you.

Interviewer: Yeah, it definitely does. Do you have a drag name?

Sabrina White: Sabrina White!

Interviewer: Where did that that come from?

Sabrina White: Actually my first drag name was Serena Michael. my first boyfriend was Michael and Serena was from Bewitched, the evil sister from Bewitched. So, I did it for fun for Halloween and the next thing, "Ooh lemme get a cat" and I adopted a cat and my cat's Serena. Well, I can't be Serena Serena and I have this cat named Serena so, I'll be Sabrina then. So I became Sabrina, and the White came, actually from my mentor which was Chastity White he kind of mentored me on makeup skills and helped me improve my craft a little more, so I took his last name of White. From my drag mama.

Interviewer: There are different styles of drag there are drag king, drag queen, comedy drag, queer artist, bioqueen, and camp which one would you say you fit into?

Sabrina White: I'm drag queen or as I like to call them female impersonators. Actually, before I'm onstage as a female, I'm full boy nothing is changed or altered about me, so I prefer actually female impersonator because that's what I competed as. I don't live my life in drag all the time I don't walk around the bars in drag I just do it for shows only, onstage.

Interviewer: So, your style of drag, you would say drag queen?

Sabrina White: correct

Interviewer: And your husband, is he into drag?

Sabrina White: He does not do drag. Well for Halloween, I'll allow it for Halloween, that's all he gets to do. He wants to do more, he thinks, but I won't allow him, he's not pretty.

Interviewer: How does drag right now affect your life as an artist?

Sabrina White: Well right now it is my life. I'm doing drag almost four or five days a week here. Performing, so it actually is my life it helps make my money pay my bills off right now.

Interviewer: So, are you just doing drag right now or are you doing other things?

Sabrina White: Right now, I'm cooking in a kitchen like a couple days a week for extra spending money. Keeps me out of the house, keeps me out of trouble. It's just my fun money, as I call it my "vacation fund."

Interviewer: I know you mentioned a boyfriend and a teacher who like kind of influenced you and helped and guide you, who would you say influenced your drag?

Sabrina White: Probably my first show that I saw in Louisville, Kentucky at Connection Complex, that whole cast there was like four or five girls on the cast. They were all different styles and they were all glamorous and beautiful, and they just inspired me to be the best me that I can be. When I first started drag in 92/93, they were all behind me and pushing me and helping me out. Giving me a little piece of hair, giving me a little piece of jewelry, a little dress here, you know, trying to push me and encourage me to be a better Sabrina White.

Interviewer: Would you say, from then to now, did your drag change at all?

Sabrina White: Oh, it changed, it changed a lot, yeah. I've mastered my craft, I guess you could say. I learned how to do make up now I teach people how to do makeup, I teach others now. I've gone from the student the mentor now. I have actually, two drag daughters that I mentor a lot. One right now is Miss Gay America, she has won that title, and another one won All American Goddess At Large a couple years back. So, they're both national title holders as well.

Interviewer: And they're under you, so they gotta be [inaudible].

Sabrina White: Exactly, you gotta pay it forward.

Interviewer: So, would you say that through the years, as you progressed and get better, was there any other influence, like down the line?

Sabrina White: Just kind of watching T.V., being really involved in like fashion shows, watching ?, all the big designers and stuff. Watching their fashion shows in New York all the time. I grew up, I actually left Louisville in 95 and moved to Baltimore, MD, which is like two hours from New York, and I would go up there all the time and watch all the fashion shows and stuff to see as much as I can.

Interviewer: Okay, good, now, would you consider your drag political? Why or why not?

Sabrina White: Political, no mines, mine is like fun drag, it's a chance to escape reality for a moment, to come onstage, to be able to perform for people. To allow them to escape reality forget about their worries and troubles for a couple of hours, to have fun and just sit back and relax. I do it for pure entertainment.

Interviewer: Now we are going to talk a little bit about your life as a drag artist. Are you a part of a drag family?

Sabrina White: Well counting, yeah, well this right here, the cast here is like my sisters at Hamburger Mary's. My family is my drag mother, and I do have a drag stepmother in Baltimore, Joanna

Bloom, and then Margaret Davis is like my drag mom in Louisville who got me started. Right now, I have two drag kids and they have drag kids of their own so I'm like the mother to most the drag queens in the Baltimore, MD area and DC. Or grandmother or what we like to be called the "glam-ma". The glamorous grandma, it's the glam-ma.

Interviewer: So, you perform here [at Hamburger Mary's]. Do you perform anywhere else?

Sabrina White: I travel all over the country a lot, actually I was just in Las Vegas last weekend performing. I get to travel a lot. You know, former Miss Gay America opened up a lot of doors for me, I used to do the whole country. I have been to almost every state except for four states in the United States traveling as an artist.

Interviewer: Where haven't you been?

Sabrina White: Where haven't I been? I have not been to Nevada, oh well I've been there now. Denver, New Hampshire, Washington State and Colorado.

Interviewer: Man, I bet Washington, I can't imagine that.

Sabrina White: Yeah.

Interviewer: How often do you perform, like how many nights do you perform here?

Sabrina White: I perform Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. I have my own show Sunday nights twice a month and then we have two shows, three shows on Saturday so. Like, almost eight shows in about four or five days.

Interviewer: Wow! Busy!

Sabrina White: Yeah!

Interviewer: And how many girls are here?

Sabrina White: We have five girls, six girls on cast here now.

Interviewer: And this place hasn't been here that long.

Sabrina White: A year and a half, it opened in January of last year, 2018.

Interviewer: So, what does getting ready for a performance kind of look like?

Sabrina White: Hours behind the makeup! No, we actually are very blessed to- we have a backstage assistant that helps us get our shoes on, he gets us dressed up, unzips our costumes and helps us put our costumes on. Of course, we do all our hair and all our makeup and stuff, but he's there to help us get ready and go onstage real quick. We're lucky, we have a five-girl cast here, a lot of shows have like three girls so there's a lot more rush backstage to get ready real quick. Like ten minutes and take one character off, I do a lot of character work as well like Cher and Reba and stuff so it's hard to get out of that character and get the makeup on and get the new wig on and get the costume all on and stuff.

Interviewer: And you're not having to like, go offstage and come right back there's like someone.

Sabrina White: Oh no we have like five girls between numbers. So yeah there's a good 20 minutes between so we get plenty of time back here.

Interviewer: How does the crowd usually look? Is it pretty packed here?

Sabrina White: It's pretty packed, especially Saturdays. Saturday nights is like our busiest day, we have two shows Saturday, 6 and 8:30 and it's like 200 people usually here. It's a very diverse crowd, we have old, white, all colors, everything's here. Sometimes we have kids here at brunch shows and stuff too. Yeah, it's like a Disney brunch, it's actually coming up at the end of the month, once a year, we do it in May as like a Disney brunch. We have the Disney characters running around we all do Disney songs, lots of kids are here. We usually bring them on stage for a sing along from Frozen or something. It's a lot of fun.

Interviewer: That's neat, what would you say is your biggest challenge of doing drag and being a drag queen.

Sabrina White: My biggest challenge with doing drag and having to be onstage and having to MC because I talk really fast and so it's hard for people to understand what I'm saying most of the time, so it's the chance, I hate to like talk with the microphone.

Interviewer: But if that's your only challenge...

Sabrina White: That's it, I've got everything else mastered yeah!

Interviewer: So, is there anything unique to the drag scene?

Sabrina White: Anything unique? It's all been done, everybody's copied everyone else now. There's very few people who are actually unique and creative in the artform now.

Interviewer: Like compared to other cities or countries?

Sabrina White: Other cities? Well, here we're more of a seasoned staff er, cast here. We're all in our 40s here, we've been in drag for like 20 plus years, all of us, so we've been around for a while. A lot of the cities like Tennessee and Louisville, they're all a little bit of the younger crowd, they're a little more energetic and more creative, I guess, maybe. But we're more seasoned here. We're professional here. We're professional divas here.

Interviewer: So, no drama here?

Sabrina White: No drama here, never. Of course not, there's always drama, no matter where you go, especially in drag.

Interviewer: How do you identify as far as sex, gender identity?

Sabrina White: I'm a dude in a dress, I'm a 100 percent boy.

Interviewer: So, when people approach you while you're in drag would you prefer them to say, what would you prefer them to say?

Sabrina White: Sabrina. Because I'm actually impersonating a woman so I'm in character.

Interviewer: So, while in drag that's okay.

Sabrina White: Correct.

Interviewer: But out of drag...

Sabrina White: No, I'm Russell.

Interviewer: So, the next question is what pronouns do you use out of drag, so 'He'

Sabrina White: He.

Interviewer: So, has drag influenced your sex and gender identity?

Sabrina White: No, not really.

Interviewer: How has drag influenced you to think about gender?

Sabrina White: Not really anything, not at all.

Interviewer: Nothing changed?

Sabrina White: Nothing's changed, at all no.

Interviewer: Even from when you first kinda was introduced to it.

Sabrina White: Well it was a little confusing to me at first, when I first started, because some of the girls on cast there had titties, and they was little, cuz they were boys, cuz they had a penis still. But yeah it was confusing then when I first learned about the different types, but now it's like, there's nothing you could do, I've seen it all now.

Interviewer: So, you were introduced to drag at a pretty early age, you said like 15?

Sabrina White: No, it was like 30 years ago when I was like 20, 21. I'm old, I'm almost 50 years old now.

Interviewer: You're not old!

Interviewer: So how has drag impacted you and change you?

Sabrina White: How has it impacted me and changed me? I don't think it changed me at all. Its bettered my life a little bit, the money is so good. Here especially. It gives me a chance to travel the country and have fun and meet people all the time. It's kind of bettered my life a little bit, I think.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you more outgoing?

Sabrina White: Oh yeah, definitely, when I'm in drag yes! As Russell no. I like to sit by the pool read a book sit at home and cook something.

Interviewer: So, it's kind of like an on/off switch, like "alright let's go"

Sabrina White: Let's go! Here she is boys, let's go, come on. Shake ya titties.

Interviewer: So yeah, the next question, has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Sabrina White: Not really, I mean it's help me a little bit, become more of a people person like I said I was kicked out of the house at a very young age so I've kind of stuck to myself, try not to be that...

Interviewer: So, if you could go back in time what advice would you give the old you?

Sabrina White: Don't do it. No, um, I would say go balls to the wall. Enjoy every minute of it. Do it as much as you can while you can because life goes by so fast that I would never not do anything. There's lots of stuff I wish I did that I didn't do, lots of pageants that I should have ran for that I didn't run for.

Interviewer: What advice would you give someone else that was interested in drag but kind of skeptical, what advice would you give them?

Sabrina White: I would go for it. Do it. Enjoy your life. It's not cheap, it's expensive. I've got a lot of good, good drag isn't cheap but cheap drag isn't good.

Interviewer: What are your thoughts about RuPaul and the drag show?

Sabrina White: I think she opened up for a lot for, especially here at Mary's, a lot of mainstream, she's become a lot more mainstream, more commercial sometimes in more of the straight people, the straight community. What she's done bad for the gay community though is made it so that people don't come to our bars anymore and watch our shows at the gay bars and all the gay bars are kind of shut down now because drag is so mainstream now, it's okay to do these things. Like Hamburger Mary's is surviving because it's more of a straight crowd that comes here, like 80% of the people that come here wanna come see the freaks basically. But that's what RuPaul did for us, as far as the gay bars, it kind of hurt them a lot, a lot of them are shutting down, especially in the East Coast.

Interviewer: So, I want you to share one or more of your social identities. Race, class, age, religion, size, sexuality. How does that change drag for you? As far as like your race, was it difficult for you, or your age. Was it difficult for you getting older now, not that you're old?

Sabrina White: I admit it, I am old. It's, I'm not as much of a dancer anymore, I used to be a much bigger dancer, backflips and splits and all that stuff. Now I get all winded after 30 seconds of dancing and I'm like okay that's enough I'll walk around now. Take a breath. Other than that, not much really has changed.

Interviewer: Nothing really held you back from anything? Kind of stopped you from opportunities?

Sabrina White: No.

Interviewer: Well that's good to hear.

Sabrina White: I've been very blessed.

Interviewer: Have you ran in to people now or in the past that have had problems because of their religion or their...

Sabrina White: Well my parents were very religious, the Baptists, my father was a preacher so, yeah. It was kind of a problem to come out of the closet for them to accept me. But other than that, there's been a couple of pageants that people like come on and like the Westboro Church will be up there picketing the pageant like [mocking noises] all that stuff. That's about it though really. It hasn't really impacted my life.

Interviewer: How do you define drag?

Sabrina White: My definition? I don't even know what my definitions of it is anymore, it's changed so much from when I first started. It's all inclusive, anyone that wants to put on a wig and entertain can do it. I mean it's just basically entertaining for the crowd. To me personally, a drag queen...to me a cross dresser is someone that just puts on girls' clothes and just walks around a bar setting type thing, a drag queen is someone that actual gets dressed up in women's clothes that are costumes and actually performs for a crowd. That's the definition. Anyone.

Interviewer: How do you think drag has evolved since you started, what's different about it?

Sabrina White: It's evolved because there are like women doing drag who- there's guys with sex changes, there's drag kings now, back in the day it was just like drag queen only. Now we wear hip pads, it wasn't as detailed as it was back then. It was basically just put on a dress and some lipstick and a wig and you're good to go. Now we're you gotta wear hip pads, you gotta wear the right bra, you gotta wear the right costume and sequins and feathers and go, like, off the wall and just go crazy on it now.

Interviewer: So, I'm curious, how expensive does it get to be a drag queen?

Sabrina White: it gets pretty expensive, like right now I'm competing in a pageant in the end of June. I just bought two evening gowns, they were like \$4,000 a piece, just for two dresses. So, \$8,000 for two dresses.

Interviewer: And that's just the dresses?

Sabrina White: That's just the dresses, not the shoes, the earrings, the jewelry. For the earrings, the bracelet and rings, about \$300. The shoes, about \$100 for custom shoes to be made, my wig I'm gonna wear for my hairpiece will be about \$250. So, one gown, one look is going to be close to, like, almost \$5,000 for one look, one night.

Interviewer: Do you make your own hairpieces

Sabrina White: I do that, yeah, I make a lot of my stuff for like, shows and stuff. For a pageant I prefer for it to be done professionally so, I'd rather look perfect. Like for shows I've been making my own costumes here, making my own show dresses and stuff, I can do that for about \$150.

Interviewer: So, you sew?

Sabrina White: Yes, I do sew. I taught myself at a very young age when I was poor and I couldn't afford new stuff, I got myself some cheap sewing machine from Walmart and some dollar a yard fabric from Walmart and started practicing. I was getting fabric and cutting it out and sewing it together like "Ta-da! It fits magically, now"

Interviewer: What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Sabrina White: To escape reality or to entertain a crowd and allow them to escape their own reality for an hour or two, just to have fun and just let go and just escape our delusion of entertainment.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not?

Sabrina White: I don't think its sexual at all, no, it's like going to a Broadway show and watching Lion King, you might get turned on by their costumes or their nakedness but it's not sexual at all I don't think.

Interviewer: So, I asked this question already, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race, did you watch the show at all?

Sabrina White: I watched it here and there, I watched the first two seasons. I am RuPaul's Drag Race right here, we do it on a living basis. So, to me it's nothing new.

Interviewer: Now this is a personal question, no personal but it's not on the list. Would you ever try out for the show? Or something similar like that?

Sabrina White: I've thought about doing it last year, but I didn't because I'm doing a pageant this year. Actually, a lot of my friends are on there. My drag daughter, er my drag granddaughter India Ferrah is on the show, she was a couple of seasons ago, she was season three or four, I think. Coco Montrese was, there's this Miss Gay America, I also know them. Like I know a lot of the girls on the show, plus the pageant girls and if I wanted to apply for the show, I could just say give them a call and get put right through to the auditions. Because there's like the audition, there's also a video you send in to them, there's a phone call audition, there's like you send in pictures and they send like action shots of you performing onstage in the third part and the fourth part actually, you come there, they fly you in and watch your process and stuff and you talk them through it what you're doing in drag and how your life is, and while you get in drag they kind of interview you get kind of used to that and they come watch you perform, they watch you in your home bar.

Interviewer: So, what life changes do you think will like...partake when...

Sabrina White: If you audition next year and do it next year, I'll probably get a chance to see the whole world instead of just the country. Put all the girls like Asia O'Hara, one of my baby girls too, she's right now in the United Kingdom and she's been to Australia, traveling the whole world right now and making a lot of money. That would be exciting I think, all the travel.

Interviewer: And all the money.

Sabrina White: Yeah, the money's incredible. She's also spent like, money on her costumes, she's putting money back in to that.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community what would it be and why?

Sabrina White: I don't think we have to change anything because we are all doing it for fun it's our money and we are investing a lot of money into it now and it evolved so much that we are all different in a way, no one is the exact same. What I do wish people would do more of is use their voice as a drag queen to give back to the community more, could be like raise money for their different organizations. I've been to a couple of shows here in Saint Louis. I was very involved in Baltimore. We gave back to charity and stuff, but here, I've been working with Doorways and I've been doing shows here for them. And giving them like, so much, like my last number of the night, my tip money would go to them each night, like \$150 a week, \$100 bucks a week. Raising money for that.

Interviewer: Okay, good to know. What do you are some misconceptions that you think people have about drag?

Sabrina White: That we enjoy wearing women's clothing. It's so uncomfortable, it is not pleasant at all. People think that we have fun walking around, they think we sit at home in our panties and bras and watch TV and clean our house. We don't do that at all, that's a misconception. For onstage only, onstage viewing, that's about it.

Interviewer: Do you get questions about it?

Sabrina White: Oh yeah, people will come by like "Hey do you wanna come by my house with your panties and your bra?" Nope. I don't wanna do it. "Wanna come bring your high heels to my house and go on a date?" Nope. Not my cup of tea, I'm married.

Interviewer: So, I'm sure you're used to stuff like that now.

Sabrina White: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Comments, positive and negative.

Sabrina White: Very much, yes.

Interviewer: Do you get compliments or...

Sabrina White: Mostly compliments now, now that it's more mainstream, especially here. Back then straight guys would go to the bars and they would try to be like, hit on the drag queens. Nowadays it's so mainstream straight guys will be like, "Hey, cool, what's going on, what's up bro" and I'm like "Hey bro, what's going on man." Y'know, full drag.

Interviewer: So where do you think that comes from, that misconception like "Oh do you wanna..." you know

Sabrina White: I don't know, I guess because we're men in dresses they figure that we're freaks and that's how we get our rocks off, I guess.

Interviewer: What do you think would help people change their mind about that, their mindset about it?

Sabrina White: Having RuPaul helped a lot because especially they see them come to the workroom as boys and they get in drag, they don't arrive in full drag already for each challenge. They come to the thing as boys. It's how we live our life, as boys walking in the workroom each week is like "Hey, guess what, we've been on break for a week, we're back, we're living our lives as boys and here we are coming in to the workroom and getting ready."

Interviewer: If you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag what would it be?

Sabrina White: That it is a lot of hard work, it's very hard work, what we do onstage isn't easy, to some people it comes easier than others but it's still a lot of work we do, and it is a job. We spend a lot of money on what we do, so yeah.

Interviewer: So, you said you were Miss Gay America?

Sabrina White: Miss Gay America, 2002.

Interviewer: Any other pageants or anything you've won?

Sabrina White: Right now, I'm, I've won numerous titles, bar titles and state titles and stuff. At Miss Gay America I've won six titles, state and regional titles, go to Miss Gay America. Right now, I'm Indiana All American Goddess, I'm competing for All American Goddess Pageant at the end of June in Daytona Beach, Florida, and I'm one of the favorites to win, so that's exciting.

Interviewer: Does your husband go with you?

Sabrina White: He will this time, yes. I spent almost 30 grand to win 6 grand.

Interviewer: Do you usually go by yourself?

Sabrina White: No, no. I come with my dresser, somebody who helps me get dressed, zip my dress up for me, makes sure the back of my hair looks perfect where I can't see and my blind spots. They kind of help me out with that. And we have eight professional dancers that go down, and hotel rooms and to get them in the bar each night and provide them food for the weekend and transportation. It adds up quick, yeah. Like the prize money for Miss All American Goddess right now is \$6,000, so I'm spending four times that much just to win that title, just to represent that title for a year. Yeah.

Interviewer: Sounds good! Sounds Great!

Interview with Tiki Vonté

To cite this interview please use the following:

Dant, Emily. 2020. Interview with Tiki Vonté. *Sociology of Drag*, SIUE, April 29, 2019.

Audio available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/tiki-vonte/>

Interviewer: Alright, hi T.K., T.K. right?

Tiki Vonté: Yes.

Interviewer: Alright, so, first question I have is, When did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Tiki Vonté: I think it was 10th or 11th grade when I first learned what drag was and, I really don't like it, but my initial thought was like "Oh that's gross? I had a very toxic idea of what trans identities were and what drag was. So, for me it was like "I don't like that, that's weird, it's not for me, I don't want to get into that."

Interviewer: Yeah, and then when did that perspective change? When did you start performing as an artist or realized you wanted to start performing?

Tiki Vonté: Honestly a couple months later I remember it was New Year's Eve and I was at my best friend's house and she and I were just hanging out and RuPaul's Drag Race was having a marathon. We were both like eh let's give it a try and after like two or three episodes I was like, "Ok this is really cool, like, drag artists are like actual people and are just putting their artistic outlet into drag. It was so interesting and like so cool seeing them create things. I was like " Okay, I like this now, I want to do this, let's get into it.

Interviewer: [Laughter] Yeah! I find RuPaul's drag race is a great way to get people interested and into the world of drag.

Tiki Vonté: It makes it accessible for everyday people and for people who have the same mindset that I did, like, "Oh, that's bad." It kind of humanizes it.

Interviewer: And then how did your family, friends, or other loved ones receive you being a drag artist?

Tiki Vonté: That, honestly, is really funny to me. My entire family are really cool with it and I didn't expect that at all. I didn't think that they would be upset that I was doing drag, I just didn't know how it was going to go over. But I'm friends with my grandma and some other family members on Facebook and in January I entered a drag competition so as I was posting about that and how I was doing with it. My grandma started telling my other family members and then one day I was saying alright let me sit down and call everybody one by one. They were all just like "Yeah your granny already told us, good for you and are you having fun?" "Yeah!"

Interviewer: Well that great that they are really supportive of you. It's really funny that it all started with grandma!

Tiki Vonté: Thanks Granny! My friends were very supportive when I first started going to drag shows about three years ago when I first moved to St. Louis. I didn't have a car so all of my friends would take me to shows and when I started doing the amateur nights they would be the ones to give me makeup or wigs and what not. It's been a lot of positive reinforcement. Sorry, I talk with my hands.

Interviewer: Oh, you're fine! And where does your drag name come from?

Tiki Vonté: So, my drag name is Tiki Vonté and Tiki comes from Nicki Minaj. When I first started getting into drag, I was like alright I want to be Nicki Minaj Jr. Everything that she does I want to do. So take Tiki Minaj...no... Tiki a Trois, you know play with the ménage a trois thing or Tiki Lewinsky was my name when I first started because Nicki has her alter egos. I was like, "These are cute but I'm not as big of a Nicki fan as I used to be" so these doesn't really fit anymore. Tiki Vonté is a pun of my own name. My first initial is T and my middle name is Kivante so it's like that's perfect, Tiki Vonté

Interviewer: It works really well! This is kind of a long one, but there are a lot of terms for types and styles and drag. You know there is the glamour queens, comedy queens, bearded queens, is there any particular label you have for your drag?

Tiki Vonté: I thought about this one, I would say that my drag is banjee, so it's like hip-hop, street style, and urban aesthetic, but also, I like to be on either end of the spectrum like really cool or pretty, or really weird. I'm also like fantasy androgynous...I can't think of the words for it.

Interviewer: That's okay, there's a lot of different queens that seem to have more than one style.

Tiki Vonté: I think it keeps everyone on their toes and it lets you have more fun with it.

Interviewer: It is less, I guess, predictable, or you never know what they are going to come out as next on the stage.

Tiki Vonté: I love doing a clown look so that's in there too. Like, oh pretty cool street girl, or a clown, or a mermaid, who knows?

Interviewer: It's all over the place but I'm sure you make it work really well. Does this type of drag style affect your life as a drag artist at all?

Tiki Vonté: Yeah, I feel like everybody's style or what they bring affects where they will get booked or what type of shows they'll be able to be in, or even what venues they can be in. With me doing all these different, weird types of drag, I'm a little bit more accessible to being booked at different places. But I also don't draw eyebrows, and I don't do pretty girl face. My face is very pretty, but it's plainer. I don't want to look like an average female presenting person. I am a drag queen and I want to look like one. There are certain bars I know I won't get booked at unless I start drawing eyebrows or start painting a bit differently. And that's fine I'm not upset about it, It's kind of what comes with the job.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I know that some of the places that you have booked at have certain theme nights, does that affect it at all?

Tiki Vonté: With the themes certain performers are more likely to get picked if that is their go to style, but with doing the multiple facets, it's a little bit more easy to jump into. I was talking to a show director recently and he was like "Yeah, I was trying to book so many people for shows and there is always someone who I know can do it, but I don't want it to just be them." So, I always think "Oh, I think this person does something that will work really well for this theme." So, it's a lot of trying to mix it up, but I honestly love theme nights because it's like "You all know what I can do on my own, thank you for giving me a theme, let's be weird."

Interviewer: Yeah you can definitely take something and make it to your own style or change it around

Tiki Vonté: That's what makes it fun!

Interviewer: For both the artist and the audience. I know you talked about Nicki Minaj being a bit part of your drag but who or what has influenced your drag if anything?

Tiki Vonté: I get a lot of my influence from anime, magical girl anime specifically. [embarrassed laughter]

Interviewer: Its ok I'm a big fan of that too, no need to be embarrassed!

Tiki Vonté: That's why my drag is so weird, well not weird. I'm not a weird artist, but I am. It makes it so, like, polarizing because half of it is inspired by rap music or music videos or just the stuff I grew up with. And then also magical girls, mermaids, and fantasy. So, it's the mixture of those two. I always say would what I am wearing be in a video? Would it be a backup dancer's outfit for a singer, like a big-name singer, because that always throws it into it. Beyoncé and Nicki and other artists always have very intricate costumes, not only for themselves but for their backup dancers. So, the artist, the dancer, or the magical girl? I have to hit one of them.

Interviewer: Have you ever tried all three?

Tiki Vonté: Oh, it's coming

Interviewer: That will be a theme night! And then do you, at all, consider your drag political?

Tiki Vonté: I feel like all drag is political, because what we are doing is so loudly expressing our gender and our art and everything that we're oppressed for and making it an event. Drag artists are the pillars of the queer community. We are like the mascots so every time we go out in full makeup or whatever else we are wearing, it is a statement. It's like no matter what all is going on in the world or whatever is all going on politically, we are still here and having a good time for ourselves and we're uplifting everyone else that you are pushing down. So yes!

Interviewer: So yes, but not really, it kind of comes with the job.

Tiki Vonté: I'm not one of the performers who will go out in drag and protest and all of that. And I would love to, and I feel like that's really cool, like thank you. That's just not the route I go with it. Last night I did a benefit show for Metro Trans Umbrella group and that in itself was so

powerful, it was in an old refurbished prison. Having all these queer artists and all of these drag performers and everyone coming into this place that's rooted in so much darkness and uncomfortableness and making it such a powerful and uplifting event. It was impactful.

Interviewer: That's great. This is kind of the next category, but can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Are you part of a drag family or house?

Tiki Vonté: Yes! I am in House of Effort, we're trying. Our drag mom is Duchess and she is a bearded queen here in St. Louis. Duchess is one of my favorite performers and I know I have to say that because she is my mom, but she is really cool. Duchess she is a bearded queen and for as long as I have been in St. Louis and as long as I have known her, she has always had such a long and full beard. She flat irons it which is really cool, but Duchess is a theater costumer, so all of her looks and outfits have always been extravagant or very well crafted. That's kind of what drew me in and then my sister Moxie, we were suite mates our freshman year in college and roommates our sophomore year. So, we started doing drag together. Their first night in drag was my second so we have been in this together. Duchess and Moxie both do video game production so that's how they got linked together and how I got pulled in. Our older drag sister Helena Handbag also went to college with us but way before we got there. She declared Duchess as her mother. it wasn't like "Oh come here you are my child", it was like "You're my mom, do my makeup, we're cool." All of us here are just having a good time

Interviewer: How often do you perform and where do you perform at?

Tiki Vonté: How often is a hard question right now. I just recently got into steady performing, so this month I have a show every Saturday and then I have a show this upcoming Wednesday. This is the most I have done back to back, but before this month it was at least two or three times a month. I perform a lot at Attitudes, that's my home bar. I performed at Grey Fox couple of times and The Crack Fox for bigger shows. So, a couple of places around St. Louis. I want to start traveling more. In February I got to go down to Louisiana to perform. I'm from Memphis so I'm really trying to get a gig there. Chicago is really close, and they have a really good drag scene, so I am trying to make connections to go up there as well.

Interviewer: And with your performances what goes into getting ready for a performance? Obviously, all of the makeup and picking out your outfit.

Tiki Vonté: Yeah, uhh. A lot of stress

Interviewer: Do you have to do warm ups and have to warm up the limbs?

Tiki Vonté: I should stretch honestly. For me, it's a lot of anxiety. I am a very anxious person, it's not that I'm ever like oh I don't think I'm going to do well, but it's like I don't want this to be worse than my last performance. I always want to do better so whenever I am doing my makeup or picking out my outfits, I say "Eh I wore this" or "Eh I have already done these colors," or "Eh I don't like how my makeup looks right now because it looked better last time." So, it's a lot of planning to make sure that doesn't happen. The day of a performance, I don't really eat, and that's probably not the healthiest or safest thing. When I am in full body I am being really constrained and my stomach is being held close by like several pairs of dance tights and a corset, so I don't

want to feel sick. I will listen to my songs first thing in the morning then, if I go to work, I will listen to them on my way home. Then I can't listen to them anymore because I will psych myself out. And, as unhealthy as it is a lot of cigarettes go into getting ready to calm my nerves and then take a break from doing drag before I have to be in it for a while.

Interviewer: What is the biggest challenge to doing drag and being a drag artist for you?

Tiki Vonté: Money? One of the first things that I was told back before I started doing drag is that it is a lot more expensive than you think it is. Even if you make all of your own outfits or make all of your wigs, you still have to purchase the materials. Makeup isn't cheap, you can buy cheap makeup, but you have to buy a lot of it if you are using it steadily. You go through it a lot quicker than you think you will. I always like to look really good because I feel like everyone is expecting you to look better each time they see you. Even if they are not, I really want them to because that is just how I am as an artist. I always want to be grander. I always say as a drag artist I am a mermaid princess, so I have to look like a princess. There is just a lot you have to have. For the competition that I just did, and it lasted two months, in one month I spent like \$400 alone just to have enough stuff. There is never a pay off with drag, like even if you get tipped really well one night and you get paid for the gig that is paying for one thing you purchased for the show. So, it's a lot of passion and wanting to do it. You are putting a lot of money out there. But it works out because you still have that thing. Like I bought a wedding dress for one night and I used to the wedding dress to cut it open and cover it in blood. The wedding dress was like \$70 but now I have a wedding dress. So, it balances out, it's just a lot.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the St. Louis drag scene, where you live, compared to other places in the country?

Tiki Vonté: Yes! For some reason St. Louis is full of gender queer creatures of drag. Everyone here is either a demon or a goblin or a mermaid or an alien or something. Everyone here is so against the gender binary and I love it. When I went down to Louisiana for my show, they are a very pageant driven community, so all the performers there are title holders who are working up towards a pageant. And even while I was there they were like, "Oh, we would love for me to come back and do a pageant here." That's great, thank you, but that's not my thing. Everyone here [in St. Louis] has a pair of prosthetic ears, that's our thing. I have some dragon mermaid ears, Moxie is the party goblin of St. Louis. There is one drag house and all of them are a different creature. I think that's really cool so we're just all pop punk emo drag creatures.

Interviewer: Nothing wrong with that. This one, I suppose this one is a little more personal, but how do you identify in terms of your gender identity and gender expression outside of drag? Your pronouns inside and out of drag?

Tiki Vonté: I am genderfluid non binary. So, I describe my gender as a constant flowing infinity sign with either binary on either end. So, whenever you ask me what's your gender? It's just wherever I stopped when you asked me that.

Interviewer: Freeze-Frame!

Tiki Vonté: Right?! I use they/them pronouns outside of drag. Before I started doing drag steadily, as far as presentation goes, some days I'd go "Oh, I want to wear makeup and dress more femme" or "Oh, I want to look more nonbinary," or "I want to look more masculine today." But since doing drag, steadily, outside of drag I just want to wear jeans and a t-shirt. I don't really care about makeup or accessorizing. I have to do that a lot now.

Interviewer: Yeah, when you spend all of your time doing that it's nice to get in to comfy clothes.

Tiki Vonté: Still not at sweatpants and a hoody yet, but I'm really working on it. But, in drag I prefer she/her pronouns just because that's me at my most feminine peak. I'm not out at work or everywhere when I'm out of drag, so I let people use he/him pronouns. I don't like it, but I don't care enough to correct you on it. So, I like having that difference. It makes me feel more comfortable.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced your sex or gender identities? Has it helped you explore them?

Tiki Vonté: Not so much, like I said I started doing drag three years ago, so by that point I was already pretty set, or I figured out who I was attracted to and how I wanted to present myself. It did help me translate it. With the being more feminine and more masculine in and out of drag. It, kind of gave me that outlet. I don't feel as dysphoric anymore and that was something that was starting to get really harsh for me before I started doing drag. I would be just sitting here every day and think "I don't feel feminine, I don't have the feminine body that I want." I'm always masculine and no matter how much I try to change it with my clothes or a little eye shadow that I'd put on, I still felt masculine. So being able to be in drag and have the body I want, have the face I want, it makes me less anxious about it.

Interviewer: Yeah, drag is a really good way for people to find how to express themselves. How has drag impacted or changed you? Does it boost your confidence as a person when you are in or out of drag?

Tiki Vonté: Yes. Me being an introvert, I'm one of those extroverted-introverts so everyone assumes that I'm a really social person and confident, but I'm really shy. I do not like talking to people, large crowds make me feel uncomfortable. So, going to shows is a lot of forcing myself to go into that environment, but I still wasn't ok with talking to people. Even like when buying a drink, I would always ask a friend to do it because I don't like being loud. But, being in drag more, and a lot of people forget that drag queens are working. Our job is to increase drink sales, make sure everyone there is having a good time, and to make sure everyone is feeling invited. So, having to put myself in that mindset when I'm in drag, makes it easier for me to go up to people and like "Oh, are you having a good time tonight?" or "Oh what are you drinking?" or "Oh I like your shirt." Doing that so much in makeup makes it a little bit easier when I'm not. I go to a lot of shows just to support friends and I'll see someone across the bar or on the patio and I'm like they're cool and I will go talk to them. It's making me more comfortable around people most definitely.

Interviewer: That's good. Let see...If you could go back in time as Tiki Vonté, what advice would Tiki give to your younger self?

Tiki Vonté: Oh...be more yourself. I feel like for so long I was so afraid to express myself or be as feminine as I wanted to be or even to try things I wanted. Just because of where I grew up and the people that I went to school with. I went to a performing arts middle school and high school, so it wasn't like I was the only queer person, I was just so afraid of being the only queer person. I refused to accept that there are other people like, "Oh, they're queer, they're bi, they're trans," but in my head it was like "No, it's just you, don't let them know." So that would be the first thing that I would say. Also start working with makeup.

Interviewer: You gotta start young! I'm curious if, and how your social identities have impacted your experiences of drag. Can you share about how about one or more of your social identities such as gender, race, class, age, have impacted your experience?

Tiki Vonté: The only thing...oh words...people of color in drag across the board, no matter where you are, they have that extra obstacle. As much as we want to deny it, the queer community is still just as racist as the outside community. But with drag it is a little more complicated. I wouldn't go as far to say that because I'm black I'm not booked at all of these shows, or I don't make as many tips. There have been multiple times where it has been very apparent to me that my race is why this certain thing happened. Back when I was still doing amateur nights it would always seem like the one queen of color in the entire show who did different drag, and I don't want to say better, but I just felt like I should have placed higher than I did in the competition, or little things like that. It's fine there is no harsh feelings on my end for the other performers, it's just I wish that wouldn't have happened or I wish that would have happened a little bit differently. For the longest I felt like I wasn't getting enough credit that I thought I deserved. It was partly me being really cocky and thinking I'm like hot shit, but it was also based in a little bit of truth, like, I wasn't getting all of the recognition that I should have been getting at a certain point, you know? That's about it, since I've started working more, doing more things, it's kind of shifted. One thing that I talk about with close friends a lot was how palatable I am. When I'm performing, or the song choices I do, for the longest they were pop music and I kept playing up the princess side of my aesthetic, as opposed to giving them the full rap girl banjeeness. I always pull it back a little bit to make the white audiences feel more comfortable around me, or not doing certain songs because of the words in it. But now that they know who I am, I'm starting to shift it. Like no this is Tiki, but so is this, it's a little more calculated.

Interviewer: This more about your ideas about drag, how do you define drag itself?

Tiki Vonté: I think drag is artistically and strategically playing gender. Anyone can do drag and honestly all of us are doing drag. We are all performing what we feel like is gender. Wearing makeup or not wearing makeup, what shoes you wear, how you style your hair, it's all drag. It's not being artistic with it that makes you a drag performer, it's about how far do you want to push it how much of the binary do you want to use or how far away do you want to stray from it. How extreme do you want to go? How small do you want to go? I feel like that is what drag is at its core, and everything else is just what you do with it.

Interviewer: And then what do you think the purpose of drag is?

Tiki Vonté: It's an outlet for...well not an outlet. It is to have fun with gender. Drag is so gender based, it is just for us to take our little sliver of gender that we all have and run with it. Where do you want to take it, how much fun do you want to have with it and uplift the queer community with it. Just like I said a couple questions ago, we are the pillars and mascots of the queer community. So, we are here to uplift each other and to force everyone else to look at us.

Interviewer: Do you think drag is sexual?

Tiki Vonté: Not inherently. It can be if that's what you want to do with it, like if you want to be a burlesque performer with it, yeah that can be sexual. If you want to do certain songs for certain performances that are overtly sexual, yeah. At its core it's not, there are so many drag performers who go and read to children, or there is this one group who is called Deafies in Drag and they are all hearing impaired and they do drag shows in sign language to connect to that community and that's not sexual. I feel like everyone assuming that it is, is something that was put on us by the straight community who don't accept it. Like, "Oh these men are dressing up as women and they're being sexual so I don't want them around me or around my children." That not what it is in the slightest.

Interviewer: They probably lump it all together with deviance and everything. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race? I know some queens love it, some queens hate it.

Tiki Vonté: I, because of how crucial it was to my development, I love it. I'm one of the people who watch it faithfully every Thursday or Friday, I'm on the Reddit channel, I have a Tumblr blog dedicated to it, so I'm invested. But also, I completely understand where everyone is coming from with how problematic it can be, or how problematic RuPaul is, or even how divisive it is for drag. Because it does only showcase one specific style, and yes, they let on people who do different types of drag, but it pushes them all into one keyhole. Everyone make something for this, and it is all based on what RuPaul feels like is the best so it's not completely true. But it does so much for the community like it makes it more accessible to people, its making drag more mainstream so across the board we are all getting more accepted, more people are coming out to shows, more people are experimenting with drag, because it is showcasing it. I feel like we wouldn't be as far as we are without it and that is one thing that a lot of people forget.

Interviewer: Yeah it is definitely been a very big advocate for the drag community and getting a lot of straight people into drag. Do you have anything you would change about drag or the drag scene/community?

Tiki Vonté: I would like for our drag scene here in St Louis to be a little more diverse. So many shows are mainly white performers. There aren't that many up and coming performers of color. I still like to go out to the amateur nights that are once a month and see who's new or who's progressing and see what's happening. In this new wave of entertainers, I can only think of two other black performers, and that is just so discouraging. Partly because how St. Louis as a city is when it comes to racial issues, but it's also because there are not that many of us who know how to connect with our drag here. Like I said we are a bunch of pop punk emo gender queer creatures so there is only so many ways you could answer that. The only shows that I can think of here that are mainly people of color or mainly black performers are on nights or at venues that

aren't highlighted or advertised as much for. They also do a lot of pageant drag and acting woman drag. So, it's either you're a pageant queen or you're a weird queen but you don't really know which way to go because there isn't that many people to connect with. That is something I feel like St. Louis has to work on its own. Across the board I just want drag to be more accepting. Like everyone does their own style of drag, everyone does their own idea of it and there are so many people who feel because of RuPaul's Drag Race that it has to be pretty, it has to be this, it has to look like a woman. It's like no, everyone does what they want. Drag Kings deserve more recognition, performers who don't shave their beards deserve more recognition, just accept everybody's drag for what it is and have fun.

Interviewer: Kind of stemming from that, I know you mentioned a few things but what do you think are misconceptions that people have about drag?

Tiki Vonté: One of them I feel like a lot of people assume is that if you do drag then you are trans, and that's not true in the slightest. I have known straight cis-het people who have done drag and have had a blast with it. I just feel like everybody assumes drag is only for certain people and that it's gross, it's sexual and all these different things but it's not. Enough people don't watch drag or see drag enough to really get it, so they make up their own thoughts about it. Whatever it may be either positive or negative. Enough people aren't actually paying attention to it to have their own understanding.

Interviewer: And last question, if you could choose one thing that you want people to know about or learn about drag what would it be?

Tiki Vonté: It's a lot of work with not a lot of payoff, but everyone who does it loves it. They want you to love it and we are all just here to have a good time. That's all I want people to know just have a good time, accept it, try it! I feel like everybody should try drag at least once just to get it.

Interviewer: Alright that is all the questions I have for you today Thank you so much.

Appendix: Interview Questions

Drag artist's personal story with drag

1. When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?
2. When did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?
3. How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?
4. Where does your drag name come from?
5. There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, from drag queen and drag king to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen, and camp queen, among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do? What's your style of drag?
 - a. Does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist? (If so, how?)
6. Who or what has influenced your drag?
7. Do you consider your drag political? (Why or why not?)
8. Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?
 - a. Are you part of a drag family, house or collective? (If so, tell me about it)
 - b. How often do you perform? Where do you perform?
 - c. What goes into getting ready for a performance?
 - d. What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?
 - e. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world?
9. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?
 - a. What pronouns do you use in and out of drag?
 - b. Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities? (How?)
 - c. Has drag influenced how you think about gender? (How?)
 - d. Have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag? (How?)
10. How has drag impacted or changed you?
 - a. Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag? (if so, how?)

- b. If you could go back in time as _____ [use drag name], what advice would _____ [use drag name] give to your younger self?
11. I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice-versa, how drag has impacted your identities. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities, such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc., and/or the interaction of these social identities, have impacted your experience of drag, and/or how drag has impacted your experience of this social identity?

Drag artist's ideas about drag

12. How do you define drag?
13. What do you think is the purpose of drag?
14. Do you think drag is sexual? (Why/why not?) (If so, how / in what way?)
15. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?
16. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be? Why?
17. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag? (Where does it come from? What do you think would help change that?)
18. If you chose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?